

CLOSE UP

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AS IS

BY THE EDITOR

What wars there are!

What a duckpond, what a chicken-run!

The panic phase dissociated but left floating—vague rubble in a lake of rather rubbly men left floating also.

Phase of mental thumb-biting, save-me-first-ishness.

Klang, Phototone, Tobis, Movietone, Naturetone, Vitaphone, Kinophone and how much more etcetera. Robust, good, vowelly names to gong assertiveness. Beat twenty gongs, raise twenty voices in dissent, and your assertiveness is chicken-run and duckpond cackle.

Whose system shall we use? The answer is who'll boycott whom if we use who's who's?

The cool, collected onlooker can giggle and caw. Men saving themselves are no heroic spectacle. Men saving their money somehow are. Kind of inverted heroism. Money is their most radical conviction and they will fight for it as for no white-haired mother. Recruiting authorities are

offered this as a tip for the next war. Conferences at the Hague and elsewhere illustrate quite well the point.

—Yes, the sound film war has its heroism. Human nature snaps back to virility when fortunes are at stake. The one pity, perhaps, is that the motivation should remain at a constantly so unresolvent level.

And under one war, as usual, another. The American bank rate not so long ago was raised. You remember the millions of dollars instant depreciation of securities that was so many fortunes lost, and the next day's quick recoveries? This may have had nothing to do with talking films, and nothing to do, perhaps, with bankers' decisions, but the fact remains that almost at once we heard that the bankers behind the American producing firms were ordering cuts in talkie overhead—orders which affected most of the big studios and most of the big combines.

A clue, perhaps—well, let us pry!

Talkie production—had you not read it yourself—was so cheap. We had heard it as well as read it. Fewer sets was one of their reasons—a reason only too readily to be apprehended. As many sets, shall we say, as scenes in any three-act play. Much cheaper.

Fewer cameramen. Less film in consequence exposed. Less montage. Less tentative in taking. Less waste, re-shooting. The Stroheim ten-feet-used-and-a-million-scrapped already in the history book among quaint customs of our ancestors. One cameraman as glass encased and stolid as the waxest fruit of a past epoch, grinding scenes of which the four hundred feet limit of his film is only at the first strangled sob in the heroine's speech to her sweetie.

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The newer method is a strong, silent case of felt which the *appareil* wears like a top-coat. This ponderous box is supposed to make it possible to lift the camera about again. It might have led to a recurrence of superfluous footage and cameramen, but the weight of this 100 per cent silencer plus, say a Bell and Howell, suggests it would be easier to lift the Nelson column. Renewal of mobility, unlikely.

Limitation of space—another money saver. Honolulu sprouts (or would do) in the studio now. Its balmy breezes fanning palm leaves made by the studio hand which gently shakes the branch. Do you remember *Hungarian Rhapsody*? Excuses if you are trying to forget it, but there, in a film that was virtually silent, though meant as a motif undertone for tzigane Hungarian airs, Hoffman, the great, magnificent master, allowed somebody to shake leaf shadows over Dita Parlo's close ups in one scene. Apart from the fact that they were very badly shaken, the master did not trouble to repeat them in the semi-shots. Which is just the kind of thing that happens when you take your outdoors indoors. But you must not say this to a director of talkies. It is surely bad enough for him, his operator, stars and staff, that all free holidays in sunny lands are at an end. Can you blame them if the foliage flicks like whips? But, all the same, remember, money saved. And money saved is money earned, they say.

Simplification of method. Days now not weeks to finish up those supervisor-hunted, out-of-schedule shots.

Good reasons, these, for cheapness. Then why the Wall Street ultimatum?

"SLASH!" (see *Cinema*. August 12th.)

The answer might be "Slush."

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Slush, the cheat, losing men their bankers' backing. Slush, the revenue boomerang, missing the box office by the whole of a public's contempt.

Turn back to your *Cinema*.

Though, (it states) there have been wholesale claims from the studios that the making of talking films is less costly than that of the old silent product, this is now proved to be an illusion, mainly by reason of the hurried methods of the executives in the race for big names the balance has been heavily weighted by the high prices paid to stage stars, big name directors, boosted writers and famous orchestras. The eleven top-line producing concerns have recently enlarged their contract players by almost 100 per cent., most of these demanding and getting colossal salaries. Paramount, Fox and M-G-M- have swelled the total of directors by 100 per cent. These, too, are augmented by a great number of song writers, score composers and lyricists, as well as star musicians.

Elsewhere in the same article we read that the general cost of talking pictures has increased by 30 to 35 per cent.

How funny it is!

"High-priced stars will be told where to get off at." This was what was being written when talkies began. When every company was more or less on the verge of bankruptcy, when every resolution was a cutting down of needless expense and inflated salaries. The talkies were going to accomplish everything. Capturing world markets was only part of the idea. Getting back to normal costs was going to be the first big change. What were talking films not going to do?

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And now, rather pathetically, rather worse off than ever before, the big men of the west are seeing once more those Wall Street bludgeons—maces of the magnate monarchs. Talking pictures a flop?

No, there is great virtue in not leaping to conclusions. In a civilized world survival is rarely of the fittest. Talking pictures may quite well live. And this need not be disappointing, for they are not the rich relative whose every going to rest you hope may be his last. They are, in fact, very poor.

A specialist could diagnose them, perhaps make them fit to be the friends of man. *Close Up* would offer its services for a very high fee. But that's just what they want to avoid.

KENNETH MACPHERSON.

PHASES OF CINEMA UNITY III

Very little, if any, attention has been paid to *light* as *unity*. The fact that the quality of lighting or filtering in a film is not uniform has generally called forth criticism of what people call technique. But uniformity can be judged only from the viewpoint of unity. Similarly, diversity of light-quality, of tone and pitch, is the concern of unity. Technique permits weaknesses that unity declares injurious. For instance, take the common practice of inserting frames from

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an old newsreel into a film, so generally employed in war-sequences. These portions are certainly authentic, but since they do not participate in the quality of light or the temper of the light arrangements, they are intrusive and *unreal*. The reality of the established light-unity has been contradicted.¹

Of course, it is possible to incorporate different light-qualities—a variety of tones and pitches—into a single film. It is possible to *incorporate*, and the incorporation is the proof. But a film must be light-planned to achieve such incorporation and the alternations must be intervalled and timed in duration in the total rhythm of the picture. I have not seen many films that succeeded in doing this. Feyder's *Thérèse Raquin* was a contradiction—very delicate and to most eyes imperceptible perhaps—between the construction of two lightings not alternated nor balanced in the intention of a single organization: German studio lighting and the usual French interior light. In France, it is worth noting that unities of lighting are most often achieved by men who are originally painters: Alberto Cavalcanti and Man Ray.²

No one, so far as I am aware, has yet dwelt upon the unity of the absolute film. I shall here only record a few indications. The key to the unity of the absolute film is

¹Or refer to Epstein's *Six and a half x Eleven*. The inconsistencies of lighting seriously disturb the continuity of pattern and flow. Bad studio equipment may have produced this.

²Another phase of light as unity is the relation of the lighting to the nature of the film. I include in the matter of light the tone of the raw-stock too. Frequently the use of a brown stock is antipathetic to the mood of the film. But in Clair's *The Italian Straw Hat* the stock provides just the period color-tone which coincides with the entire attitude of the film.

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its *absoluteness*. The lesson of the films of Richter and Man Ray's first picture to the makers of films of machine sequences should be: the construction of a suitable material. Will not some absolutist construct the machine whose visual-motor rhythm he is to re-create on the pellicule for projection upon a screen? As it is, most machine films remain documents and not completely absolute rhythms. For while the screw and bolt of a machine are essential to its original function, they may not serve the film. We have by now documented enough machine movements to create an absolute machine as material for the absolute film. It will not, finally, be a working-machine, but may take the form of human semblance and find its source in those interesting sculptures of the German, Rudolf Belling, where human portraits are modelled upon machine-analogies. In the machine film, as in sculpture, spaces between solid parts are portions of the structural design. Belling is the sculptor who has best used actual hollows in the total design of his portrait.

Nothing so interferes with the unity of an absolute film as the presence of a human figure not arranged into the entire absolute structure. It may be true, as one critic has observed, that the appearance of a human figure into a film of non-human contents relieves the spectator's tension. But that very relief is intrusion.¹ The absolute film of all films makes

¹ In one of the most pleasing of the machine films, Deslav's *The March of the Machines*, at one point a man is visible behind the machinery. The austerity is broken for the moment and the mind needs to re-construct the absoluteness.

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no compromise with the spectator's prejudice and habit of mind. Its unity is its only determinant.¹

In these days unity must pre-occupy itself mainly with the unity of compounds. Most objections to the sound film—though the objectors themselves seldom know it—are assertions that the sound or talking film contradicts unity. In the journal issued by Charles Dullin, "Correspondances", a writer dwells upon the nature of this contradiction. The article is not written with the film in mind, but the view expressed pertains to the cinema. The view is this: we are single-minded, and compounds of our senses achieve no singleness because one sense or another dominates. If this is true, then a movie can be seen only and not seen-heard simultaneously and equally. But I am not sure that the writer is correct. Indeed, I am sure that he is not. It may be true that we have not until now apprehended multiple articulations because these have not been aimed in harmonized concurrences. It may be true that one sensory medium has been so emphasized that it was predominant. But I think this is not

¹ I have omitted certain major concerns of unity, especially important to the absolute film. They are the direction of a movement, the texture and the volume. I may take as an example of all three Mme. Dulac's *Arabesque*. The texture and the movement here are not sustained nor are they patterned exactly. The play upwards of the water-hose annoys the forward horizontal movement, and, because it is a concentrated slender force occupying only a portion of the screen interrupts the crystalline texture occupying a major part of the screen. The use of the woman as part of the *Arabesque* intrudes two distractions: one of a human subject not sufficiently impersonalized into an objective detail, and of a detail differing in volume or solidity. But this *Arabesque* was offered by Mme. Dulac as a tentative in design endeavoring to utilize a variety of details. It is most instructive.

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absolute or unavoidable. To create an operative unity in the cinema certain cares will need to be taken.

If the writer referred to above is not entirely correct in his assertion, still within his statement there is discoverable the point of view for the compound film. The compound picture will need to be *preconceived* on the basis of one sense. That one sense will in itself be no simple sense. The film is not simply a visual medium: this needs to be said again and again. The film is visual-motor. The rhythmic pattern of the sound film will be conceived, as is the silent film (ideally), upon a visual-motor graph. Time and space are its structural elements. Upon these bases are imprinted the emphases of pitch (light sound), distribution (color-values, sonal tones), etc. Time and space, visual-motor fundamentals, determine, however, the placements of these emphases. They comprise within themselves: scale, duration, alternation, counterpoint, simultaneity, climax . . . The film contains also elements that are visual and that are visual-tactile (textural), as well as—in the sound film—those that are sonal; but these elements must be submissive to the visual-motor. In this way, may I call for Mr. Betts? The film remains a film—but that isn't really so very important.¹ What is a more important cosmic

¹ Mr. Betts still waxes courageous against the sound film. What he still attacks is the stupid uses of the sound fi'm to date and the unjustifiable suppression of the silent film. And shews thereby he condemns the compound film. When suddenly he says: "They (the Russians) are experimenting on different lines and putting sound in its proper place, as an adjunct to the film instead of the film being an adjunct to the sound." Then Mr. Betts is in favor of sound properly used? He goes on to entomology, with that cute irrelevance of English thinkers: "If the fly as it moved on, uttered a little squeak, do you imagine it would become more of a fly in consequence? No, it would become more of a nuisance." Is Mr. Betts implying that the silent film is nuisance enough?

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implication is that man *may* be on the verge of experiences that, though they are multiple in their origins, will be singular in their apprehension (by man).

Movement: that, we are told by the cinema critics, is the key to the nature of the film. Or it is visual drama. Another will say: dynamics. And still another: fluid rhythm. In brief, all of these characterizations are both too generic and too fragmentary. Movement yes, visual drama certainly, dynamics indeed, fluidity and rhythm positively. One contains the other and all are but terms until we re-associate them, separate the association into its several functioning parts (parts, that is, that are immediately usable). It is best, therefore, that we set down first several simple laws to clarify the nature of the terms.

The authentic perception of movement, to quote Jacques Dalcroze, is not of the visual order, but of the muscular order. (Visual-motor).

Movement is not succession of motions. In cinema movement no motion may actually take place, but an interval may occur, an interval of time, between two images and that is movement too. In other words, movements are two: the actual movement of a body, and the constructed movement attained through time and space-successions (in montage).

The movement of a film is not cinematic unless it is plastic. There must be balances and contrasts. Repetitions, repetitions in variation, "the progressive deformation of a theme": altogether rhythm, which practicably includes:

Time, space and pitch durations:

Of a scene, of a sequence.

Of an image, of a tone.

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Mr. Matthew Josephson, an American writer and erstwhile film-enthusiast of the late "Broom," saw in the American western film his ideal of film-movement. This was an enthusiasm generated by the French dadaists, and it is still being uttered in England—as yet, a decade behind in its film-judgments—by a writer in a weekly periodical. The movement of the American film has been movement, it is true, but the movement only of an object and not of the integral film. To clarify my meaning, I should like to refer again to Carl Dreyer and *Jeanne d'Arc*. Mr. Dreyer believes now that in the latter portion of his film he should have graded the bold images in first, second and third plans: the head first, then head and torso, then full body. This may have reduced the dramatic psychological attack upon the spectator which was so powerfully effected by the succession of first plans, but—and this is a first rule of a unity!—*the film and not the spectator, determines the structure of the film*. The succession and alternation of first, second and third plans are part of the aesthetic organization of the film, its plastic, rhythmic movement. Dynamics is just another name for the climacteric construction and organization of these various elements. It refers to the accumulative forward march of the film. The drama refers to the narrative source (the literary experience) which the spectator receives in its final converted form through the repetitive, alternating, varying procession whose elements I have briefly considered above. There is no single kind of motion, no one sort of dynamics, no only form of rhythm, no one and only category of film.

I have thought it necessary to consider, if only for a moment, these inclusive film-terms to protect the film from the glib

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repeaters of old phrases who would circumscribe the cinema with these phrases. I say here that it is the creator of films who tells us how many kinds of films there are, and not the critic. Indeed, the studious and serious critic of the film will never say, on looking at *Jeanne d'Arc*, as did one young American journalist, that though that film moved him strongly, it was not cinema, which is, according to him, naught if not the movement of shadows. Again, you see, a rudimentary observation inflated to a final determinant.

The most casual observation of motion in the film should have indicated to the glib young commentators that the capture on the negative of a thing in motion is not the ultimate of cinema motion. A reference to the physical basis of cinema and to the final organization of the positive for projection should have elucidated the principle that the film is not merely a report but a construction. In the introduction to "Filmregie und Filmmanuskript," Pudovkin attacks the viewpoint of the "turning" of a film, "the shooting." A film is *built*, he says. This building is *montage*. *Montage* is the construction of the unity. As such, it is no mere assembling of film-strips, but is pre-conceived in the initial conception of the theme. The montage is worked towards from the beginning, just as in the final act of montage, the entire film from its first definite expression in the film manuscript is included. Therefore, there is a montage of the manuscript. So long as montage is understood as an inclusive creative (constructing) unity, it is the valid vantage-point of film aesthetics, but the moment it shifts to the mere job of cutting or, as it frequently appears in the work and utterances of the Russians, a device for effecting the spectator,



From the Meshrabpom film 120,000, directed by Chernyak. The profile belongs to A. Orlovoy.



From *Spring*. A Wufku Production. Author-Operator: M. Kaufmann.



The best film of the Georgian Goskinprom : *Ilisso*. Director : N. Shegepaya. Operator : V. Kereselidge.



Caba, produced by the Goskinprom, Georgia. Directed by Taurel. Theme : The struggle against drunkenness among workers.



From *New Babylon*, the Konsintzoff and Trauberg masterpiece.



Rain. Filmed by Joris Ivens. Idea and continuity by M. Francen.





Un Chien Andalou, a Studio Film of surrealism by Louis Bunuel.
Below : P. Batcheff.





Paul Guevedo in *Vous Verrez la Semaine Prochaine* . . . a short burlesque by Alberto Cavalcanti.





Catherine Hessling in *Vous Verrez la Semaine Prochaine*





Yvette Guilbert in *Manque de Memoire*, a new film by Henri Chomette.



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without regard to the level of the theme as experience, it is contradictory of unity.

The motion picture has been too occupied with the spectator. This shifting of the concern from the intrinsic film to what is fallaciously called communication has been one of the chief causes for the non-establishment of a film unity. It is true that a film is meant to be experienced by some one other than the creator of it. But experience—the systemic, ideational experience of art—is never a product of the intentional effect. That is a consideration *out of* the intrinsic work. But if the artist is faithful to the highest demands of his subject-theme, as articulated in the construction, experience is the result. That is purity. That is unity. That is the aesthetic as against the rudimentarily psychologic, which, in the film construction, is a physical attack. The film, on the whole, remains no more than a physical attack, and the talking film, as it is produced to-day, has further lowered the level of this physical attack. The view of film-making as effect makes for passive (even apathetic spectators), the view of film-making as the strict realization of the intrinsic makes for active, completely participating spectators.

The film, because it does not dwell upon itself, does not realize itself. In all lands it disdains idea. Therefore, it does not achieve complete conversion into a final form, therefore does not achieve unity—hence not the experience that is art. The entire mind of internationalism, whether it is the large sale of the American commercial viewpoint or the propagandistic reduction of the Russians, thwarts this penetration of the intrinsic theme and its re-making into the form of the film. The film to-day, only very, very seldom attains

to more than a manner or a style—an aim discarded by every serious and earnest artist as spurious, specious and non-propagating—and almost never to form, which is the unity *informed* constantly by the thematic-philosophic intention. Without this intention, of course, there can be no form.

Unity, more than ever before in the history of the film and the history of mankind, challenges the consciousness of the artist. The film is alive at the very moment when the multiple-unit is being attempted in painting and in literature and in music (in the realm of the mechanical), when artists are endeavouring to create entities of diverse utilities. Very little more than simplisms have been achieved through these endeavours, for an alien attitude prevails, an attitude which still is worried about effects, which thinks of purity as reduction, and the conglomerate as the inclusive. It is time a criterion was established, for without it the artist wallows in a morass. The experience of the artists in these mediums should prove most valuable to the artists working in the compound cinema. That literature, painting or drama is not the cinema does not mean that literature, painting or drama cannot by their experience clarify the intention and method and viewpoint (philosophy) of the cinematist. Not exclusiveness, but inclusiveness, is the valid mind for the artist.¹

¹ I read that the olfactory film is an actuality, as is the tactile and the stereoscopic. The conglomerate mind is working. Confusion! Several months before the natural vision film was shown in America I heard from Spoor of the Essanay Company as to the depth film they would soon be urging on a public too easily persuaded. I saw, as I had already suspected, that those commercially interested in this three-dimensional movie would never recognize that it was a distinct form needing considerable study, and not another realistic effect. To take a hint from painting, perspective as a means of simulating reality has been a betrayal of painting. Perspective as a device for plastic organization is a major utility of painting.

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To provide a basis for his film's unity, the film-maker must select his relevant sources and select from them. Is the French absolute film the source for the Dutch and Belgian artist? Compare the work of a Kirsanoff (a Russian, French-tutored) in *Mists of Autumn* with Joris Ivens' *Rain* (which I saw in Amsterdam, before its final mounting) and of which the idea and continuity are the work of M. Franken, *Rain* is the purer of the two because it is less troubled by effecting a mood upon the spectator, that is, it is less sentimental. Yet it creates a sense of the persistent melancholy. In *Rain* there is detectable a temper which, if it is perceived by the Dutch cinematists, can be further extended into a permanent Dutch cinema attitude. Contrast this temper with the *perpetrated* mood of the Kirsanoff film and you will detect in it the un-sentimental perception of a uniform tone in a definite condition of nature. If this germ can be placed into the apprehended experience of the Dutch people (as the film will reveal), Holland will create an autochthonous and original cinema, contributing richly to the experience of the world. That the Dutch cinema-adventurers have felt the necessity for working with the indigenous life of Holland is whispered by the presence of the film made by Franken and Ivens, *Breakers*. But strangely, what the phototechnician Ivens put into *Rain*, is not discoverable in *Breakers*. And Franken, who directed the film, did not understand that the mere statement of a relationship is not the relationship. By simply stating the relationship of the three persons and the analogy with the dunes and sea—and not developing this relationship nor this analogy by insistence upon the evidences of sea-temper or the numerous other opportunities afforded, the sub-

ject lacked assertion, fullness and culmination. The analogy demanded the speculative mind, such as Epstein exercises upon phenomena, but so far as I was able to detect, this speculative metaphysical mind is not yet a portion of the Dutch film attitude, nor am I sure that the Dutch mind enjoys such effete practices as Epstein employs. *Finis Terrae*, I was told in Amsterdam, is a wretched film, and all that is good in it is here and there a *physical* device. Yet *Finis Terrae* should have meant something to the Dutch practitioners as a study in the utilization of natural tempers and in the exploitation of native types. They might even avoid Epstein's speculative treatment to see his structural employment of bodily parts. I think it would be well for the Dutch cinematists to remain concerned with the physical evidences of *folk*. They have at hand a rich source in their graphic art. They should go, not necessarily to their greatest artists (though Rembrandt can teach every cinematist much about tones) but to those of their artist, or Flemish or German artists, who have remained most folkish: an Abel Grimmer, for instance. Or for grander employments of folk activities to the paintings of the Brueghels and to Bosch—these are full of the kinetic. The galleries in Antwerp, Brussels and Amsterdam are replete with sources. I refer this examination to the cinematists of Belgium too. In Antwerp, the Flemish Cinema Club has produced a film *Leentje van de Zee* (Peggy of the Sea), which I went to view thinking here might be the rudiments of a folk-film, if not a realized folk-film. The Dutch film *Breakers* possessed a dignity and seriousness of effort. But this film of amateurs with its ancient story of childhood love, the drunkard foe, the false accusation of

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murder, the crippled idiot's devotion and martyrdom was hilariously stupid. Nothing to redeem it, not even an honest intention. Yet for as little an expenditure these amateurs might have produced a document of some Flemish village which might have taught them just what material they possess. And by studying their graphic artists they might have learned something of tones and textures and stylizations. Carl Dreyer did not disdain the sources existent in graphic art. He found such sources in the medieval French miniatures, in Flemish art (the blood-letting scene), in Brueghel (the fair scene, the mob explosion, after the explosion the poignant prayer scene at the drawbridge), etc.¹ The Dutch and the Belgian cinematists will do well if they study their folk-painters, look into their folk-writers, watch their folk-movements and remain folk for a while. Whereas in the lands of more ambitious cinemas of longer history, the fullest cinematic achievement will be attained if folk is utilized only as film-history. That is, Germany and America have done enough folk filming, now they must transcend folk. Germany has done this, for instance, in Hans Behrendt's film, *Die Hose*—the German comedy here leaves behind the redundant Harry Liedtke folk film, like *Wochenendzauber* (a jolly local picture), or the Fritz Kampers picture *Semkes sel*

¹ It is true that graphic knowledge may injure the cinegraphic, but such injury proves only the incapability of the injured. Murnau believes—if he has been quoted correctly—that the cinematist should leave other mediums out of one's ken, yet *Sunrise* is certainly enriched by paintings (the peasant and his wife at the table laid with heavy earthenware above which a lamp is tilted). There is a difference between paintings being copied into film (De Mille's *King of Kings*) and the structure of paintings *incorporated* into a film. The latter is a fusion of basic attitudes, the former a confusion of false attitudes.

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Witwe. *Die Hose* has left these behind but has its roots in it. America as yet has not extended beyond its folk-bases. These have accumulated for America a mythology which should, when the right artist comes, create a grand and gorgeous cinema. The western film remains a folk-myth. Had there been the mind for creation when Fred Thomson did *Jesse James*, there would have evolved a film as great as *Quixote*—or at least a film of broad and racy references. I shall, however, speak of these national cinemas later. My reason for bringing them into these paragraphs upon unity is summed up thus : in the unity that is the aesthetic problem of all film artists, there are the details of unity which in each land take on different necessities.

HARRY A. POTAMKIN.

(Our readers who have enjoyed and profited by Mr. Potamkin's excellent articles which have appeared frequently in *Close Up*, will be gratified to learn that we have been able to avail ourselves of his services as New York correspondent. Mr. Potamkin is just concluding a prolonged stay in Europe, and the majority of his essays which have appeared in our pages have been the fruits of his experience of European cinema. Mr. Potamkin's demand for cinema at its source, and his ability to go to the source for his investigation have made those fruits of exceptional worth. We are certain that our readers will share our pleasure that we shall have for our New York critic (where perhaps the most significant developments of cinema in the future will take place) the one man, perhaps, most perfectly equipped to undertake that by no means uncomplicated role. Ed.)

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THE "TALKIE" MELODY

The time has come, the oracle said, to talk of many things; of talkie films and chorus girls, and Broadway's movie kings. This is the Siren Age. We have passed from Iron to Steel, and now to the blare of the saxophone's wicked moan as reproduced by a battery of loudspeakers. I sometimes wonder what Carl Laemmle buys, one half so "precious" as the goods he sells.

The talkie has come to stay. Jesse Lasky told me so himself. Yes, I have held converse with the mighty. All the twelve tribes. Will Hays predicted it a year ago. Jack Warner thinks the silent picture is dead. He should know.

He helped to kill it.

Colonel Bromhead has an opinion about it somewhere. But he has never told us.

We can only bow to the decision of High Finance and agree that the talkie has come to stay. Shakespeare, who is nearly as well known by this time as Clara Bow, predicted it in one of his plays. Biblical references to the matter are somewhat obscure, but I don't doubt you could find them if you wish. Old Khayyam has a stanza in which he mentions the "Potter's shoulder-knot a-creaking." Western Electric

have forestalled him. Only the talkies could bring the Persian Muse to life like that.

By now, the best writers on the subject agree, the talkie has evolved from the experimental stage. Those we are now enjoying, those which are now being lapped up so readily by the public, those for which some of us are sufficiently silly to pay hard-earned money, are indicative of the entertainment of the future. A sobering thought, brothers.

Until America decides to knock all the world's Quotas and all the world's industries sideways by introducing sound, that is. Meanwhile, it is better to be merry with the fruity dialogue than sadder after none or third-rate silent pictures.

In course of time, no doubt, we shall evolve a medium which will combine sound with shadow, will develop some composite means of expression in which the various elements can be blended to produce a thought. Up to the present we have merely combined to produce the front legs of the chorus and the hip-flask of the bootlegger. Broadway, as all students of the talkies know, is a place where policemen in evening dress rub shoulders with gentlemen in fancy dress, dressed as policemen.

But we cannot logically expect the talkie to continue in the way it is going. Even granting that full many a murder is born to blush unseen and waste its sweetness on the provincial screens, we must at least admit that the population of the Bowery is declining so rapidly through the exploits of the Hollywood gunmen that in decency to themselves producers will have to branch out into something new.

Another sobering thought. Welford Beaton, editor of the *Hollywood Film Spectator*, who has as sound an inside

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knowledge of the Film Colony as any journalist, informs us that within a year we shall have a return to honest-to-goodness sob-stuff. Once more we shall be able to gaze upon the sorry spectacle of Mammy left at home crying her eyes out while the Prodigal Son wastes the family mortgage making dates with the latest thing in show girls.

However, this may be, and whatever the trend of the commercial talkie, and further disregarding the development of the sound picture as an art medium, those specimens to which the public are subscribing super-profits are worthy of analysis. If you are an industrious collector of Press cuttings, you have no doubt already learnt the fact that *Broadway Melody* is the sweetest little tinkle the box-office has ever known, and that the *Singing Fool* is the greatest contribution to modern art since Ethel M. Dell wrote *The Way of an Eagle* and Marie Corelli told us everything we ought to know about the things about which we knew nothing. If, as I say, you have learnt these facts about the talkies, the appended remarks will not be of the slightest interest to you. But if—awful thought:—you are one of those rebels who regard *Sonny Boy* as an excellent soporific and *Home Towners* as a first class box-office bet for Saint Dunstan's, you may find spiritual solace therein.

BROADWAY MELODY. (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer).

About 700,000 people paid to see this picture at the Empire, London.

There are pictures and pictures. This is neither. It was my privilege to see it in company with a dear old lady who suffers from a slight deafness. She missed all the jokes. As

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I didn't notice any it came to the same thing. *Broadway Melody* is the perfect 1929 talkie. It is the answer to the showmen's prayer for a successor to *Ben Hur* and *The Big Parade* (*vide* an M-G-M advertisement in a trade paper).

It deals with the million lights on Broadway and the fate which awaits chorus girls who make dates with rich men. Enter the Censor, dancing a polka, waving a petticoat on high, and blushing painfully. It gives us an inspiring insight into the various processes through which the show girl passes in order to undress for the evening's entertainment. Exit the Censor.

But it is realistic. Yes. It fairly shrieks realism. Horns honk, automobiles put on the brakes with a shrieking of whatever it is which sounds so indescribably ghastly, feet patter, doors are made to knock on, and leading players lisp all over the picture.

There is a new technique in Filmland nowadays. Once upon a time, when the world was young and the earth was desolate and movie-less, you showed a man knocking on the door by shooting a close-up of his hand. That told the audience what they wanted to know. At the present stage of the talkie you show the fist, and your R. C. A. expert faithfully records the knock. The audience thus knows that it is a real man and a genuine knock.

Subtle, that.

Someday a man will think of shooting the door from the inside leaving the sound to convey the act of knocking. Then we shall have what will be known as talkie technique, and, if it is Maurice Elvey who thinks of it, the papers will clamour about the brilliance of the English school of talking pictures.

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Raspberries.

Broadway Melody has another attribute which stamps it as a great talkie. The light relief is supplied by a gentleman with a bald head and a stutter. There is something extremely funny in a man who stutters. Particularly when he can enunciate the word he requires by whistling for it. I wonder who thought of that gag. He will probably get a special Hell to himself, in which fifteen million bright and breezy Broadways will roar their traffic and their stutters to him. It will serve him right.

As a film—I apologise, a slip of the pen. As a two-dimensional musical comedy *Broadway Melody* has some brilliant tunes. One of them deals with the fact that I belong to you, and that you, curiously enough, belong to me. I endured it that far. But when the leading man continued with the words "Angels sent you from on high," I decided to lodge a complaint as soon as I got there. A joke's a joke.

There is a sequence in the picture all in colour. A sequence in which the faces of the players remind you of the colour of milk chocolate and their limbs have the appearance of that delightful old gentleman who exhibits part of his nudity in a case in the British Museum. Shelley said something somewhere about life being a multi-coloured sphere. Maybe he would have liked *Broadway Melody*.

The *Observer's* film critic, of whom I candidly expected better things, considers that this film has rhythm. It must have been very subtle if it did.

Having entered the Empire while the show was on, I saw it backwards, so to speak. One line of dialogue particularly

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impressed me. "You can't trust these rich guys," the hero wailed to the heroine. "They're only after one thing."

So was I. My hat. I reached it and scrambled to the nearest exit.

BROADWAY. Universal. (Trade shown at the Carlton, London).

There is only one *Broadway* and Universal has it, read the synopsis of the film at its trade show. Well, that's something to be thankful for, anyway. No, this sort of thing will get us precisely nowhere. *Blackmail* is still the only passable talkie I have seen.

In *Broadway* you find the mixture as before. Only more so. Speak-easies and murders, chorus girls and limb. But it has technique. Universal assured us of that in advance. In its production they employed a travelling crane for the first time in the history of the cinema. At least, I think it was a travelling crane. It may only have been a revue chorus. What amused me about it, though, was the fact that this much praised technique was silent picture stuff. The film bore all the earmarks of having been partially completed before the wave broke, and having been switched over to the sound studio while actually on the floor. All the while the characters are running about, they are usually silent. The moment the drama develops we drift back to the good old stage grouping.

Mind you, in parts it is not so bad. There is movement in *Broadway*. It has what perhaps only two other talkies have. Space. But the talking parts are cramped and "staged." The opening sequence, in which the camera follows a man on

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a tour of an expensive night club is to all intents and purposes a silent picture.

Broadway was made by Dr. Paul Fejos, who, as you know, directed Hollywood's *magnum opus*, *The Last Moment*. Carl Laemmle, Jnr., was production supervisor of this Universal Super Talking Special. The more we are together, the merrier we will be.

THE PERFECT ALIBI. United Artists production. (Presented at the Carlton Theatre, London).

As this film developed I really thought. . . . Yes, I thought, but only thought, that at last I was to see a good talkie. But it was merely a fool's paradise. Within ten minutes the film had straightened out into the Great White Way and the bootleggers were hi-jacking and the chorus kicking as much as ever.

The Perfect Alibi features a cast of stage players who get their lines over and act quite well along the familiar track of melodrama. It has one central problem, according to its advertisements. And that problem deals with the fact that Chick Williams is wanted for murder.

We have here, as the trade Press reviewers would say, the story of a boy who, released from a New York prison, murders a policeman during a raid. He marries the daughter of another policeman, and is suspected of the crime. The young wife tries to get him an alibi, and is amazed at learning that he is the murderer. He is cleverly trapped with a detective whom he shoots WITH THE UTMOST HEARTINESS.

The death scene, in which

A CHOIR OF VITAPHONE SYMPHONY ANGELS

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do their stuff off-stage while the drama rolls on behind the scene, ending up with a saxophonic dirge as the detective kicks the bucket, is one of the highlights of a production which, by reason of its power and the fidelity of its portrayals, the sweeping panorama of its emotions and the realistic and attractive night club settings, should most certainly please the popular patron with a taste in realistic melodrama.

A word should be added, as the reviewers would continue, on the excellence of the recording, the perfect synchronisation—as when a revolver is fired and the sound-groove emits a loud explosion at the identical moment, and the time when a car travels down a street with the amplifiers doing overtime—and the general purity and realism of the reproduction.

Well, well, well. Next please.

MOVIETONE FOLLIES. A Fox production. (Presented at the New Gallery, London).

This picture is interesting. No one, except the Fox Publicity Department, could call it good, but like *Broadway Melody* it is indicative of a definite trend in screen entertainment. *Broadway Melody* was a musical comedy reduced to the screen; *Movietone Follies* is a two-dimensional revue. Some of it is in colour.

In America, Warner Brothers are now showing a talkie-revue that is in colour throughout. It would seem that, when stereoscopy makes its debut in practical form, we shall have films which will merely be catalogues of the leading stage hits.

This picture, as a picture, is a revue. No more. No less. It cannot be called a film; it cannot be judged on film

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principles. If you like the sort of revue which gets good notices in the small-town papers you will like *Follies*. Especially if you realise it is a pioneer effort and forget the mediocrity of many of its numbers. If it has rhythms, they are the snappy, quick change rhythms of the chorus, its tempo is the hasty get-a-move-on tempo of the vaudeville stage. Its numbers are just the same.

For the life of me I cannot see why people should pay to see a thing like this when they can see a first-class revue on the stage, even aside from the novelty value of the cinema show. The Provinces may make money out of it, but in the big town it deserves to flop. When you compare it with such a brilliant piece of work as Noel Coward's show, *This Year of Grace*. . . .

Yet, with the acquisition of good authors and men who can write the sort of music which makes a success of musical comedies, the time is near when the screen revue will knock the stage version backwards. The additional power of the camera over the eye will give the screen a tremendous start over the stage. Size, depth, colour, movement, will be no object. When we get a screen revue that is snappy, colourful, tuneful, and *vast*, in the stage sense, we shall be able to dictate to Equity.

As a pioneer effort, therefore, *Movietone Follies* is interesting. It gives some idea, however small, of what is to come, however much we may regret its coming.

BULLDOG DRUMMOND. United Artists picture. (Presented at the Tivoli, London).

On second thoughts, no. Some things are best left unsaid.

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There may be some good points in this talkie. If so I never noticed them.

* * *

The tour is concluded. Let us worship at the shrine of the talkie. It is so clever. The dialogue is always so resourceful. And it sums up popular taste to a nicety. I confidently predict that when we get the first war "talkie" we shall have the Angels of Mons doing the Charleston, while the hero watches some gun-runners in the enemy trenches.

The talkie is drifting. Clever journalists in the English press have noticed the way of the drift. My handkerchief. A little weeping now and then, is tonic to the best of men.

We have seen the world's greatest talkies. Which they all are.

Ladies and gentlemen, in the words of Mr. Blakeston, the door!

HUGH CASTLE.

MECHANISMS OF CINEMA II

We have explored the serious possibilities of the new technical developments of cinematography . . . we have analysed a recent abstract film in relation to these mechanisms . . . the time has now come to launch something new.

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Further developments of the experimental film interest us intensely. I have in mind the abstract film . . . that perfectly constructed *visualisation* of an abstract set of thoughts. Has it yet been achieved? Has anything yet come up to this definition? Abstract ideas have been evoked by visual impressionism, but has there been self analysis? By self analysis I mean Dramatization.

I spoke before of what has become, for me, the classic example of Dramatization: the "literalness" of a certain passage in *The Street*. The wayward clerk sees his wife's image going away from him, as he looks at his wedding ring before staking it in the gambling hall. He is considering his wife's "nearness" . . . not materially, spatially, but in the abstract sense of conjugality. The abstraction has already been evoked (in us) by facial expression, but here is the introspective mental process itself in dramatic form: spatial nearness being destroyed.

Another and perhaps the most beautiful example ever conceived, is from *Nemesis*: the musical visualisation in the insect sequences. Here, however, visual impressions of floating music did not quite come into focus . . . they struggled but faded away again.

Actually, I am unable to describe these optical forms . . . one must see them to appreciate.

Dramatization is never *quite* the abstract meaning, neither *quite* symbolic . . . something near and infinitely expressive, and above all visual.

In the new experimental film then there must be Dramatization. The aim of cinema is to be visual and the abstract-film must visualise its abstractions in their

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primary perceptions. The man in the street will understand and learn something obscurity and mystery must be abolished.

Having swept away certain things, we may ask, is a film which satisfies these conditions really abstract? My answer is yes . . . also it is really cinematic. For are not many of us against the unevoked abstraction which must be artificially introduced by a caption, sound, or other means? Is not the whole trend of cinema proper towards visual resolution of latent import? So with abstract-cinema, for all cinema is the same, fundamentally.

* * *

The most beautiful and at the same time most powerful mechanism of abstraction is the "mix." I seem to be repeating my previous article . . . everywhere replace "latent" by "abstract" . . . the two are synonymous . . . the repetition then becomes clearly understandable. We seem to have formulated something fundamental about all cinema so that there is bound to be repetition in ultimate analyses which return to the same elementary theorems. I will therefore, not repeat the analytic reasons for this, but will content myself with the generalised statement.

* * *

Only when we discuss the remaining cinematic mechanisms in the construction of abstract-films is there cause for deeper analysis.

In dealing with abstract ideas, in general the subject matter will be devoid of personal relations . . . no human actors . . . therefore no apparent cause to use Displacement (camera angle in particular) to transfer psychic effect from character

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to audience. Those moments when the camera acquires the personality of one of the actors will as a rule be absent.

But how fascinating to displace from some inanimate thing to the audience . . . when camera becomes (abstractly) the "eye" of some dead object, "perceiving" relativistically. Surely as legitimate as the autobiography. Imagine, if you can, the autobiography of a penny in film!

. . . born in the mint with the ring of a gentleman . . . into pockets . . . into gas meters . . . into children's sticky hands . . . *burning holes in pockets* . . . relegated to the money box for misconduct . . . a devil-may-care-penny deciding at a toss the fate of its master . . . a bad penny and the hell of the crucible which awaits it . . . and of course the 'good-old' penny pensioned into somebody's collection.*

* * *

There is a leaning in recent cinema towards new "displaced" experiences which merge onto the abstract in significance. Thus, in *The Spy*, it seems we actually become the train hurtling along over rhythmically knocking rail joints . . . you remember: "thirty-three one three three"—"thirty-three one three three . . ."

Who else (or what else) in that narrative as it stands, could be perched on those axles about two feet from the ground? Let us be cautious before we dismiss peculiar camera angles as absurdities, but also let us be quite definite in our

* (*The Adventures of a Ten Mark Note*,—that despised and rejected fragment, now heavily dated,—worked this idea, occasionally with charm. The ultimate effect was, however, trite, the displacement of values soon tilting the plane of action into a constant malappropriate sermonising and false emphasis.—Ed.)

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intentions in such cases. The now well-known Asquithian limitations may also set a limit to the penetrative depth of cinegraphic introspection. Against this we are pledged to fight.

* * *

We now come to analyse the form of the abstract-film . . . *La Marche des Machines* was without commas or colons . . . its form seemed to be merely a matter of sensed sequences rather than definitely punctuated ones. Cinema has its means of punctuating its narrative content, to which latter is attached, by the bye, the primary significance of punctuation as essentially a mechanism of narration. There appears therefore no "a priori" reason for omission.

Pedantic criticism of so delightful a work as *La Marche des Machines* is to be deplored . . . still, it serves a purpose without unduly detracting from a cold beauty which may, for that matter, set its own conventions.

* * *

The future of the abstract-film is not necessarily pointing in a direction "non-commercial." On the contrary, it may be expected to achieve a wider interest as time and experiment proceed.

* * *

Later I hope to discuss the Documentary-Film and Comedy, before which latter I am already beginning to quail. I hereby definitely dissociate myself from the "technically amusing" comic, also I refuse to further its progress by discussions of any such technique. Still, I shall probably have something to say.

L. SAALSCHUTZ.

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THE IMPLICATIONS OF REVUE

Lots of quite intelligent people sniff at revue. It means to them white leg-traffic, ostentation, and (if they don't like it) jazz. As usual with a thing that is only a quite-good thing, it is the essential that is overlooked. Revue is primarily entertainment. That is why it is the only form of English stage presentation to-day with any kick in it. It's not tied down and hasn't any business about art, and what people thinks is art, to contend with. It is enough if it entertains (and how much more it does that than our drawing-room plays and our "contributions to serious dramatic Art"). It entertains all right, because there is something behind it; if you're not entertained, you don't get through to that, you don't reach the behindness, and you stay tangled up with the silk curtains and the wet-whitened legs, which of course you hate. A whirl of girls. Revue is awful. I like revue, because I'm intensely serious. It is almost the only kind of stage presentation I go to, it's certainly the only kind I get anything from. And what I do come near to getting from any other form is always something, that, in the long run, approximates to revue . . . a personality, a sketch, a type. And the great thing to me about revue is that, though part of

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a method of representation that is maddeningly tied down, in one respect it is free. It isn't tied down to time. It roves. Place to place. It flies, flits, lands here, flies off again there—a butterfly, to use a revue metaphor, handing you a bunch of flowers.

And each flower it lands on, it really does give you, essence and all. Not a Clarkson imitation. A good revue sketch gives you suddenly, easily, slickly, a person, or a way of thinking or a way of noticing that thought, quite straight. Are the living, vivid and alert characters, if any, that you have drawn from the London stage since the war, those depicted, by Tempest, Cooper, Forbes-Roberston, or are they Lillie, Gay, and, though I don't really like him, Sonnie Hale? Braithwaite of course is living, is hard and real, better than she knows and better than she'd dare to be if she knew what it is she is to us. But her plays aren't hard and real. *Silver Cord* was just her talking, in the same line as Gay talking, in *The Old Lady Shows Her Muddles*. Tallulah is a revue without music; and with not much intelligence. And it isn't really worth going to plays for personalities when you have Nellie W. and Lily Morris on the halls, though personalities are almost all the plays give you. When they give more, what happens? Have you ever seen a good war-play that was as good as a good war-film? What did that *Silver Cord* do that hasn't been attained more directly in plenty of revue sketches? Haven't schools been "got" a thousand times more subtly, with less pretension, than in *Young Woodley*? You see, the middle-class don't go to revue, consciously. So revue doesn't have to cater for them. It did once, at the Hippodrome and during the war,

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but now there are only Cochran and Charlot, and the bourgeoisie simply don't get them. They have the Co-Optimists, Dalys and lately Drury Lane putting on elaborately constipated plays. Yes, there must be a play as well. Something to think of, they call it, but it's really a drug to soothe spiritual indigestion. To ask our happy homes to get on to the speed and stamina of a revue, real revue, is too much—after dinner. Wake up and dream. No, they can't do it, so revue needn't bother and in consequence avoids being half-dead.

If you *are* half-dead, you can't cope with revue's freedom in time. You call it jerky. It exhausts you trying to follow it, panting along behind, and finding yourself pitched back to another song and dance after a ballet you never understood. What was the use of trying to follow, if you had to come back again. You call revue "disconnected", when what it has done, under its girl-show cover, is to co-ordinate time, time here and time there, and use it and not be awed by it. And so use something bigger than is possible to other forms.

But time has been as far as it could get. Being stage production it couldn't use space. This is where it links on with films. Films are free in time and space. O yes, and so is poetry, hold that. Up to now we have had to find our cinema equivalent of revue in light but polished Paramount pictures, glittering Arzners and so on. But talkies naturally meant that people would see the profits of talkie musical-comedy, a mixture as dreadful as you can imagine. If you don't like talkies, and you don't like musical-comedies, what *could* be worse than *Broadway Melody* and *The Singing Whatever-he-was*?

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Which perhaps explains why so many people did not see *Movietone Follies*. And also why the word ran round from those who did that it was worth seeing. I suppose "follies" is a bad word. At any rate, lots of people did not go. They might have heard the music in the gramophone stores, and found it was quite pleasant and reserved the film for one of those nights when all one wants is moving image and a saxophone flowing over one. But I suppose lots of people don't care about jazz. This revue isn't lost, however; it's not generally released till October. But it had a long pre-release at the New Gallery and then was on at the Astoria after that.

I trailed in, suspicious but unexpectantly acceptant, because I was wanting that night just what any big cinema gives, irrespective of the film; the kind of thing so many writers for *Close Up* are so good in describing about visits to movies. A sob-stuff with Louise Dresser was on. The lady who does not act unless the part has real artistic interest. This which had pleased her to appear in was *Not Quite Decent*. One registered this film also was *Fox*. Dresser, who always understands more than all and pardons nearly all of it, pretended to get tight, in order to rescue a goil from a hang-out. Then, mother-love embrace and "just a baby just a little tiny baby". This was a silent film. I saw just this much of it twice and I enjoyed just this much of it tremendously. She is a mammy-singer, and it all ends with her weeping into her make-up as the two Young Things leave her, stretching out a pair of half-blackened hands and covering a half-smeared face. Which is a very good beginning for the Fox talkie revue.

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Yes, it is a revue. Not entirely yet, but the nearest thing we have had and sufficiently near to make us hope they will go on like it. That is why I am writing about *Movietone Follies*; which so many people didn't think worth seeing. It got awful notices of course, after *Broadway Melody*. Opening shot, a man fitting a theatre with the name-signs of a revue, fading to lobby, porter dusting, getting ready for the opening night. Young man arrives, because his girl is in the show. The porter is Fetchit and was on his plantation. The porter says if he can't get him into the show, no one else will get out. In Fetchit's voice. So now we can be taken into the theatre.

The revue is being rehearsed. There is a story, of course. The financiers are bankrupt and beset with creditors. The young man wants to get his girl out of show business, so he goes into it himself, buys the show . . . in order to be able to fire her. She won't be fired, and all between the scenes of the revue there is back-stage back-chat. The lead won't go on, so this girl takes her place, and is a great success. Together with Fetchit, who also goes on to fill a gap and does some marvellous dancing, she makes the show. So that the financiers buy the young man out again. This story was reviewed as "slight" and probably that it "held up the action". You know that tag. Well, it is slight, that is why it doesn't matter and doesn't interfere with this being a revue. It is a pity we have to have a story, but there is much less story here, and a simpler one, than we have had in other musical talkies, so it does not bother us. As to holding up the action, it doesn't if you see it as part of the action. If you see it as part of the revue, only another turn, it

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doesn't hold up the action at all. And why shouldn't you see it that way? You like it then, and you presumably don't go to the film to crab it if you possibly can. Besides, don't you think that this story, which is so slight, has been deliberately simplified? It's such a silly little story, it couldn't possibly be meant to hold our attentions, and when the revue itself has been so intelligently directed by Marcel Silver, mightn't someone have been responsible for intelligently subordinating the story until it could be slipped in here and there as just another scene in the revue? This seems, at any rate to me, to relate the show to what is going on.

The revue, anyhow, is quite intelligently directed. The actors are introduced in revue style . . . Fetchit, the porter knocking them up in their dressing rooms with opening-night bouquets. Then the opening chorus. To get the flavour. You know opening choruses. Whoops, and lots of girls and the orchestra. Silver does this by bits . . . "legs" chant the girls, and legs aren't seen all at once in rows. There is a pair of legs; another fades in higher up on the screen, the leg part of the chorus song has gone on, this is just the chorus, but our legs on the screen go on, moving in patterns, seen in close-up, sometimes far away, black and white, fully realised in their patterning. Then one reminiscent of *Emak Bakia*. One above the others in squares, several pairs, moving in different speeds, doing different things. The same happens when the chorus is on. "... eyes . . . hips . . . lips" None of this is intellectual; it is the opening of the revue, and reaching out and not stereotyped. Mightn't it be called experimental if it were in a small film? Then the whole chorus leap on the stage,

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we don't know where these legs were before, in someone's imagination simply. We get the dance from a number of well-cut angles, as we never could on the stage. It is the same later, in *Breakaway*, we get more than usual, in this film revue.

The next turn is a song by a typist who looks longingly at the mannequins she would like to be like. The stage is a shop window with one or two posing, and she stands by the side. Then she wanders along, window after window. We realise after a little that this stretch of windows could not be got on to a stage, and there has been no scene shifting. It is continuous. She is simply walking along a street, and it is a street seen in a film and so, since the theatre is a theatre seen in a film, and we are taking it as real, the street is real. You couldn't use a real street in a stage revue. This moving along in unbroken setting of street is revue moving in space. Film revue is evidently going to mean moving in space as well as in time. Such revues as *London Calling* and *This Year of Grace* have a unity of theme and outlook which keeps the time together; the film revue as yet can only do this by means of a slight story, but it need not be thought that it will have to always. This scene prepares us, if you look at how the film is made, for this discovery about space. After this scene, the revue swings freely, where it will. The girl firm-set at first in a theatre, leads us along and leads us out of the confines of a theatre, so that when a man later sings *Walkin' with Susie*, we are prepared for the things that occur on the screen. It begins, a series of round out of focus objects, the camera moving away. They gradually crystallise into a man. Then we get him semi-close-up,

singing. It would be dull to have him simply singing. What we have is half of him, looking at us, and other halves radiating from his head all over the screen. All the heads merge, I think there are six of him, one actual and five trick ones, diagonal and upside down. As he sings and sways all these sway, so that the screen is filled with a rhythm of white gloves, black shiny hat, and teeth moving. A visual as well as a sound rhythm. We have not had a song treated like that before have we? His hands are prominent, beating time to the song, so we accept the image of a music-stand which swims up, blotting out, and letting us only see through the bars. It follows, in every sense. When it clears, what we have been seeing through the bars is a Harlem scene, Negroes walkin' with Susie,—but all the time once more the blacks and whites are relating to the pattern in which the song was originally put across. Also of course, there is what I wrote of in the last number. realisation that the screen is equally a matter of *Blacks* and whites. After some ordinary black-tail numbers, we have Negroes in white clothes; reversed harmony. And a snappy scene full of spirit.

The same thing happens with *Big City Blues*. This says "just to think to-night is Thanksgiving, everybody's going somewhere. Nobody knows that I'm living," etc. How would *you* put a Blues across? You've words and scene. Which will you use? You won't use both, of course. I mean, no one has thought of it. But you know what watching songs being sung on the screen is like. That is why you didn't go at first to *Movietone Follies*. Remember the singing numbers in the early Vitaphone days at the Piccadilly?

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And seen Estelle Brody singing *Mean To Me* before *Blackmail* at the Capitol? My God!

Marcel Silver *does* use both, however. Primitively, but having used them both, he or someone else may develop it. We have the girl just going on from the wings, with the tune being played. We hear it and see a crowd of high people, singing and shouting rather mistily. To-night is Thanksgiving. Something catches your eye as a little smaller and a little brighter than the rest. As you watch, you see it is a lamp-post smaller than they are and as you get that, you notice they have faded, away. The girl is there, singing by the lamp post. When clarinet and saxophone do their stuff, the figures swoop back. It isn't taken nearly as far as it ought to be, but even if it isn't taken at all, I'll allow you that it is picked up and not left a heavy lump on the ground.

These are the obvious things you discover and hear about the film. The cutting is very ingenious in preserving and getting the rhythm of the music in the sound, and the angles enrich our idea of revue. We see what a dance is. It isn't an elaborate show. You can spot the same dresses worn again and again, and can you beat that? There is one colour ballet, which is better than most colour ballets. The theatre in which the revue is supposed to be given is not the biggest ever built and do watch how the lady in the light dress fills up a space as she walks down in the interval. The back-stage and dressing room scenes were surely done in the plain studio itself. When you look, it can't have been a very expensive show. Sue Carol and Stepin Fetchit are the only names. It's not ostentatious. But it has a funny

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kind of sparkle about it. It doesn't attempt to satirise or "get" as Lillie "gets" waitresses, concert singers, charladies and revue actresses. There is no *Bus Rush*, and the one sketch misses fire because you can't hear Fetchit's last line, on which it depends. But look at the backstage bit, and there is a lot "got" there. A nice sketch, if you can only see it that way, of the ballet slipper man. And Fetchit's treatment of the girl who got no flowers; "Did anyone send you any flowers to-night miss?" "No." "That's right then, you didn't get none." It's not complete as a film nor complete as a revue. It is one of those you find bits in and piece together in your mind with bits from other films. But it has more bits in it than most. It shows how the camera can express the idea of revue, and how images do help sound to form new revue patterns. It doesn't come up to Cochran level, but it's the first one that gives any idea of the kick and sparkle some of us find in revue. See the revue sequence in *The Perfect Alibi* and see this, and see which is nearer to being right. And what I mean is this. If revue can be got by talkies, there is the hell of a lot more that can be got. It is the thread of ideas that make up a revue, which, in short, is an affair of imagery. And that, you see, is what a poem is, and I mean, having realised that you *can* with talkies get a thread of ideas, vocal but unlimited to time and place, it seems to me that even you who didn't see this at first in talkies, ought to see now what a lot is open to you. Lyrical filming, aery poems that must have speech and must have visual pattern which words can't do. There is masses. Masses and masses of things we had not known we could film and now simply because a revue

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can be made, surely we know what else can be made? Yes.

By way of coda, Ethel Waters, the great Negro singer, is singing in *On With The Show*, and Cochran is making a talkie revue in England, and won't somebody else do something? The fact that they've got Albert de Courville to direct another one, means that my wonderful country is trying its best to make a middle-class talkie revue. So won't someone else do something? Won't it occur to them to do a good abstract this way? I like good abstracts; I have seen so many of the other kinds. An abstract is a revue, and you can go so much further with a talkie abstract. If you want to go anywhere.

ROBERT HERRING.

THE TALKING CINEMA IN THE USSR

The problem of constructing equipment for a talking cinema was at first introduced in the USSR in 1926, by the young physicist, P. G. Tager. Since then, three scientific research workers continue their experiments: Tager, Dgiguit, and Shishov. Very soon this work will be completed.

The first part of the work consisted in an experimental testing of the principles which are laid down in the

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apparatus. At the close of the first stage of the work, on March 9th, 1927, was demonstrated the transformation of the sound waves into electrical current and then into light and reversely, the transmitting of light waves into electrical current and again into sound.

The second part of the work consisted in constructing a laboratory model of the apparatus, which would fix the sounds upon a photographic film and reproduce them anew. Besides, it had to determine the conditions under which such photographing should take place. It was shown that of all the methods of registering sounds optically upon a cinematographic film, as learned in the laboratory process, the best fitted theoretically as well as experimentally, is the system in which the modulation of light is based upon the phenomenon of a double breaking of the rays in the di-electric which is fixed to the electric pole (electro static phenomena of Karr). The registering of the sound is received in the form of a number of parallel lines of various width and intensity. This part of the work was also completed by a demonstration on March 4th, 1928, in the presence of many representatives of Sovkino, of the scientific technical Administration of the Supreme Council of National Economy, of the People's Commissariat of Education and of a number of other organizations and institutions, to whom the talking film was demonstrated.

The great amount of experimental and theoretic material forthcoming, permitted immediate construction of such models of talking cinema apparatus as would permit the technical exploitation of these apparati in the factories of the USSR.



Her Way, a Sovkino film directed by Pitrizyak and Poznansky.



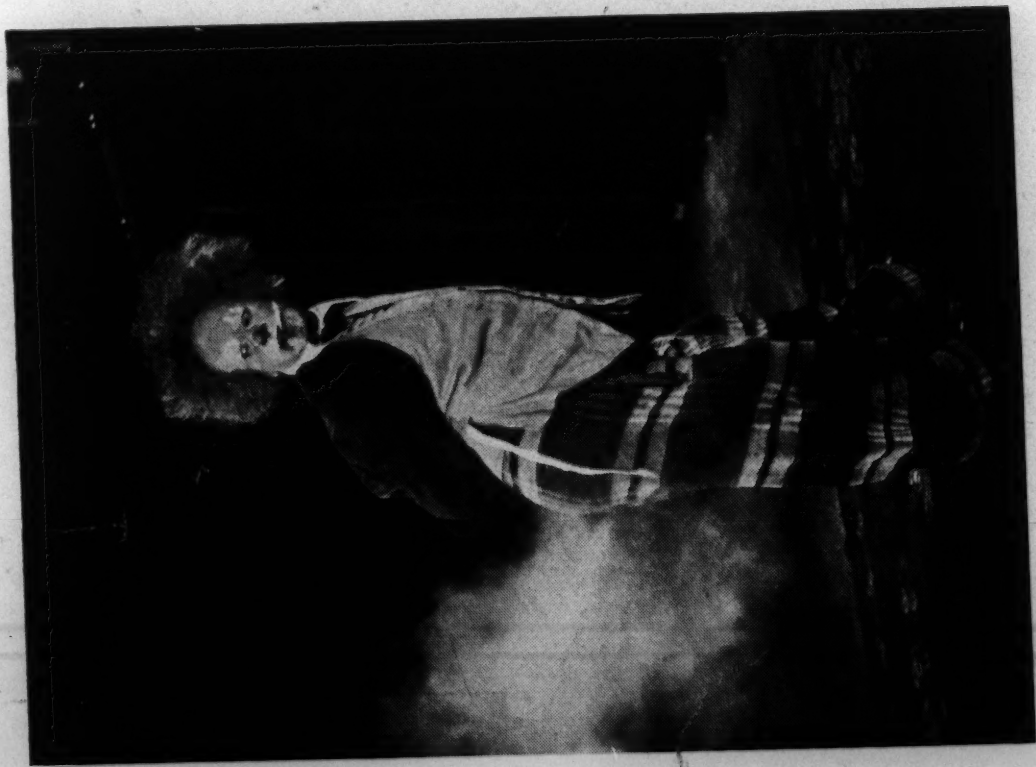
Mertegh, from the book, by D. Furmanov, of the same title. A Sovkino production directed by P. I. Moshenko.



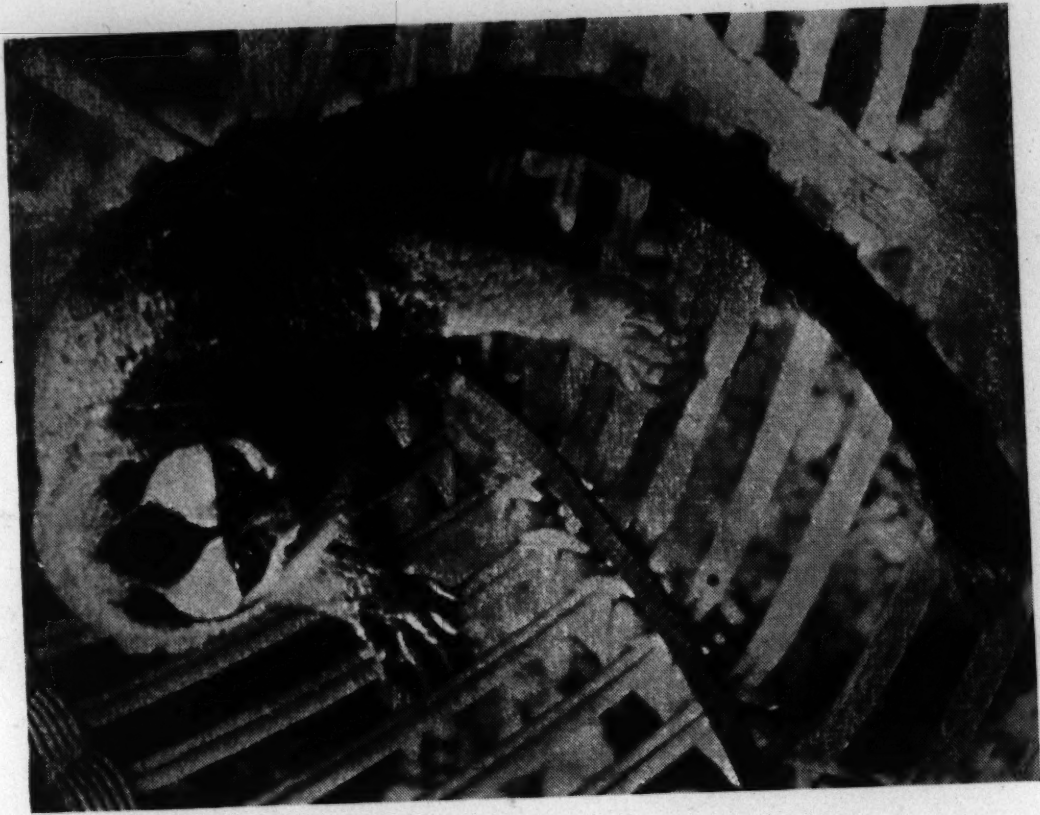
The Black Sail, a Sovkino film directed by S. Yutkevich, concerned with the problem of co-operation among the fisherman.



The Black Sail. Operator Matrov. The artist is Boslavsky.



2 *Buldi 2*, a new film by Lev Kuleshof, dealing with circus life during the civil war. Komarov as a clown.



Monkeys' Moon, a "Studio Film" by Kenneth Macpherson.



Monkeys' Moon, an adventure of two douracoulis, or nocturnal Devil monkeys. Special interest is added in that these owl-faced beasts are extremely rare in captivity. A "Studio Film."



The Fall of The House of Usher, Epstein's film from the sombre fantasy by Poe, which is being eagerly anticipated in London at the Avenue Pavilion.





The Fall of The House of Usher, Jean Epstein's film.



A British Amateur Film. From *Waitress 1*, a film by Orlton West for the Film Guild of London. Miss Allan takes the part of the waitress, whose illness and inexperience lead to a tragedy on the first day of her employment.



The Ghost that Never Returns, Alexander Room's film for Sovkino.



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Soon the first sets of equipment for the talking cinema will be put into use. The whole equipment is constructed in the USSR with the exception of a few parts of it, manufactured in Germany. It should be noted that the mass production of talking cinema equipment will be soon made possible in the USSR also, including the few parts now imported.

The construction of the equipment for the talking cinema is carried on in Moscow, at the All Union Electrical Institute, belonging to the Scientific Technical Administration of the Supreme Council of National Economy.

The first sound films of the USSR will be Eisenstein's *General Line* and Pudovkin's *To Live is Good*.

P.A.

CONTINUOUS PERFORMANCE

DIALOGUE IN DIXIE.

Meekly punctual, clasping our prejudices in what might just possibly prove to be a last embrace; we entered the familiar twilight: the softly-gilded interior twilight, the shared, living quietude, still fresh and morning-new in their strange power. We could not be cheated altogether. We might be about to enter a new kingdom. Curiosity joined

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battle with fear and was winning when upon the dark screen appeared the silent signal: the oblong of rosy light, net-curtained. In a moment we were holding back our laughter, rueful laughter that told us how much, unawares, we had been hoping. For here was fear to match our own: the steady octopus eye, the absurdly waving tenacles of good salesmanship. The show was condemning itself in advance. We breathed freely, we grew magnanimous. We would make allowances. We were about to see the crude, the newly-born. We grew willing to abandon our demand for the frozen window-sill in favour of a subscription for a comfortable cradle. Ages seemed to have passed since we sat facing that netted oblong, ages since the small curtains had slid apart to the sound of a distressingly animated conversation. We had wandered, moralising; recalled the birth of gramophone and pianola, remember that a medium is a medium, and that just as those are justified who attempt to teach us how to appreciate Music, and the Royal Academy, and Selfridge's so most certainly, how certainly we had not until later any conception, must those be justified who attempt to teach us how to hear Talkies. We remembered also Miss Rebecca West's noble confession of willingness to grow accustomed to listening to speakers all of whom suffer from cleft-palate. . .

Cleft-palate is a fresher coin of the descriptive currency than the "adenoids" worn almost to transparency by the realists. Nevertheless adenoids, large and powerful, at once mufflers and sounding-boards, were the most immediate obstacle to communication between ourselves and the semi-circle of young persons on the screen, stars, seated ostensibly in council over speech-films. Their respective mouths opened

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upon their words widely, like those of fish, like those of ventriloquists' dummies, those of people giving lessons in lip-reading. And the normal pace of speech was slowed to match the effort. The total impression was strong enough to drive into the background, for clear emergence later, our sense of what happened to film upon its breaking into speech, into no matter what imagined perfection of clear speech. For the moment we could be aware only of effort.

The introductory lesson over, the alphabet presumably mastered and our confidence presumably gained by the bevy of bright young people with the manners of those who ruinously gossip to children of a treat in store, we were confronted by a soloist, the simulacrum of a tall sad gentleman who, with voice well-pitched—conquest of medium?—but necessarily (?) slow and laboriously precise in enunciation, and with pauses between each brief phrase after the manner of one dictating to a shorthand-typist, gave us, on behalf of the Negro race, a verbose paraphrase of Shylock's specification of the claims of the Jew to be considered human. He vanished, and here were the cotton-fields: sambos and mammies at work, piccaninnies at play—film, restored to its senses by music. Not, this time, the musical accompaniment possessing, as we have remarked before, the power, be it never so inappropriate provided it is not obtrusively ill-executed, to unify seer and seen and give to what is portrayed both colour and sound—but music utterly lovely, that emerged from the screen as naturally as a flower from its stalk: the voices of the cotton-gatherers in song. Film opera flowed through our imagination. Song, partly no doubt by reason of the difference between spoken word and sustained

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sound, got through the adenoidal obstruction and, because the sound was distributed rather than localised upon a single form, kept the medium intact. Here was foreshadowed the noble acceptable twin of the silent film.

The singing ceased, giving place to a *dead* silence and the photograph of a cotton-field. The gap, suddenly yawning between ourselves—flung back into such a seat of such a cinema on such a date—and the instantly flattened, colourless moving photograph, featured the subdued hissing of the projector. Apparatus rampant: the theatre, ourselves, the screen, the mechanisms, all fallen apart into competitive singleness. Now for it, we thought. Now for dialogue. Now for careful listening to careful enunciation and indistinctness in hideous partnership. A mighty bass voice leapt from the screen, the mellowest, deepest, tenderest bass in the world, Negro-bass richly booming against adenoidal barrier and reverberating: perfectly unintelligible. A huge cotton-gatherer had made a joke. Four jokes in succession made he, each smothered in sound, each followed by lush chorus of Negro-laughter, film laughter, film-opera again, noble partner of silent film.

And so it was all through: rich Negro-laughter, Negro-dancing, of bodies whose disforming western garb could not conceal the tiger-like flow of muscles. Pure film alternating with the emergence of one after another of the persons of the drama into annihilating speech. Scenes in which only the natural dramatic power of the actors gave meaning to what was said and said, except by a shrill-voiced woman or so and here and there the piercing voice of a child, in a way fatal to any sustained reaction: slow, enunciatory, monstrous.

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Perhaps only a temporary necessity, as the fixed expressionless eyes of the actors—result of concentration on microphone—may be temporary?

But the hold-up, the funeral march of words, more distracting than the worst achievements of declamatory, fustian drama, was not the most destructive factor. This was supplied by the diminution of the faculty of *seeing*—cinematography is a visual art reaching the mind through the eyes alone—by means of the necessity for concentrating upon hearing the spoken word. Music and song demand only a distributed hearing which works directly as enhancement rather than diminution of the faculty of seeing. But concentrated listening is immediately fatal to cinematography. Imagine, to take the crudest of examples,—the loss of power suffered by representations of passionate volubility—the virago, the girl with a grievance, the puzzled foreigner—if these inimitable floods of verbiage could be heard In all its modes, pure-film talk is more moving than heard speech. Concentration upon spoken words reveals more clearly than anything else the hiatus between screen and stage. In becoming suddenly vocal, *locally* vocal amidst a surrounding silence, photograph reveals its photographicality. In demanding for the films the peculiar attention necessary to spoken drama all, cinematographically, is lost; for no gain.

The play featured the pathos and humour of Negro life in the southern States and was, whenever the film had a chance, deeply moving; whenever these people were acting, moving, walking, singing, dancing, living in hope and love and joy and fear. But the certainty of intermittent dialogue ruined the whole. When it was over the brightness of our

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certainty as to the ultimate fate of the speech-film was the brighter for our sense of having found more in a silent film—seen on the pot-luck system the day before—that happened to be in every way the awful irreducible minimum, than in this ambitious pudding of incompatible ingredients.

The photography was good to excellent, Actors all black and therefore all more than good. A satisfying, sentimental *genre picture*—genuinely sentimental, quite free from sentimentality—might be made of it by cutting out the speeches which served only to blur what was already abundantly clear, and substituting continuous obligato of musical sound.

If the technical difficulties of speech are ultimately overcome, the results, like the results of the addition to silent film of any kind of realistic sound, will always be disastrous. No spoken film will ever be able to hold a candle to silent drama, will ever be so “speaking.”

“As we were going to press,” the August *Close Up* came in and we read Mr. Herring’s notes on *Hearts in Dixie*. Mr. Herring bears a lamp, a torch, electric torch kindly directed backwards, as boldly he advances amongst the shadows of what is yet to be, for the benefit of those who follow *rallentando*. We respect his pronouncements and are filled, therefore, with an unholy joy in believing that for once-in-a-way we may blow a statement of his down the wind, down a north-easter, *sans façon*. One does not need to temper winds to lambs with all their wool in place. Therefore: As a fair-minded young Englishman Mr. Herring is for giving the Talkies their chance and their due even though his conscience refuses to allow any claim they may make for a place in the same universe as the sound-film proper. He has taken

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the trouble to consider their possibilities. One of these he finds realised in *Hearts in Dixie* at the moment when the white doctor, having drawn the sheet from the body of the mother who has been treated by a Voodoo woman, and bent for a moment, scrutinising, stands up with his declaration: "All the time," says Mr. Herring, "we see his face. Then his words cut across, 'she's been dead three days' Now, in a silent film, the visual thing would have been broken" and he concludes his remarks on the incident by describing it as "the odd spectacle of talkies assisting visual continuity."

We do not deny the possibility here suggested, but if this incident is to stand for realisation then the possibility is not worth pursuing. For though not quite the stentorian announcement of the guest-ushering butler, the doctor's statement inevitably had to be announcement, clear announcement in the first place to us, the audience, and incidentally to the sorrowing relatives to whom, in actuality let us hope, he would have spoken rather differently. The shock got home, not because its vehicle was the word spoken with the tragic picture still there before our eyes, but by virtue of its unexpectedness. It would have lost nothing and, relatively to the method of carefully-featured vocal announcement, have gained much by being put across in sub-title. But since Mr. Herring objects that sub-title would have interfered with visual continuity, we must remind him that the right caption at the right moment is invisible. It flows unnoticed into visual continuity. It is, moreover, audible, more intimately audible than the spoken word. It is the swift voice within the mind. "She's been dead three days" was dramatic, not cinematographic, and the incident would have gained

enormously if the white doctor had acted his knowledge of the unknown death, if he had reverently replaced those sheets and shown his inability to help. To be sure we should not have known about the three days. What matter?

DOROTHY M. RICHARDSON.

AUTHOR AND TALKIES

The talking picture is a prodigy. A sport. A mutation. The movie contained within itself no apparent latency of speech. Its ingenerate muteness, its lack of any rudiment of vocality, was accepted as the very basis for the development of cinema art. But now like a bolt from the silent blue it has squawked forth into speech and song. The effect has been almost as disconcerting as if an oyster had suddenly opened its shell and declaimed in unearthly tones, "My name is Norval."

And to no one has this prodigy been more momentous and bewildering than to the scenario writer. Trained to think and to work in terms of pictures, of pantomime, of silent expression, he finds himself of a sudden confronted with a distinctly different set of conditions. Under the old regime to which he had laboriously adapted himself he was at best offered precious little encouragement. His chances of successfully running the gauntlet of the requirements, the

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vagaries, the prejudices, the exactions of a Hollywood producer were about one in five thousand. And now with the advent of the talkies, with all that this departure implies of new specifications and technique, he does not know for the moment where he stands nor what his chance may be, if indeed, he has any at all.

This perplexity is strikingly reflected in the present marked falling off of submitted scenarios. There has been a drop of not less than fifty per cent. in the number of scripts received by the various Hollywood studios since the inauguration of audible films. The voluntary contributor, the man or woman on the outside, seeking to write for the vocal screen, is in the situation of a wanderer lost in a fog. He does not know which way to proceed.

Nor are the editors and the producers themselves in much better shape. They are likewise befogged with uncertainty. In their groping confusion attendant upon the novelty of the audible film they are on the one hand blindly discarding all material that had been accepted or was under consideration for the "dummies", while on the other hand they declare they are in the market for material, but at the same time do not desire that any of it be submitted in form for a talking play. Which is to say they are still adhering to the restriction of the dummy era, in inviting from the stranger nothing more definite or finished than mere plots, outlines or ideas. Their staff scenarists in conjunction with their recently hired dialog writers will attend to whipping such sketches into spoken photoplays.

There is, of course, no encouragement in this for the aspiring photodramatist. The submitting of a mere skeleton

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outline for a spoken play is as empty of artistic profit as it is irrational in its requirement. No chance here for a budding Shakespeare. He must be content with offering the boiled-down plot of a *Hamlet* or a *King Lear* and leave the writing of the lines to a dialog expert.

In their anxiety to meet the unfamiliar and novel situation that now confronts them, and in the absence of any guiding precedent, the producers are availing themselves of the expedient nearest to hand—the conscripting of established playwrights, both American and European, ensconcing them in studio cubbyholes, and bidding them under the persuasion of fat weekly pay-cheques to manufacture so many feet of dialog for a given scenario. Also, when not immediately engaged on this hack work, they are expected to hammer out original masterpieces for the speaking screen. The public must be served. Some immediate and dependable means must be employed for fulfilling the year's schedule.

This is not said in any spirit of disparagement. The producers' lot is not a happy one. A studio, like a factory, must be kept going. Whatever time is needed for developing and perfecting conditions and meeting new problems must be snatched in the midst of current manufacture. Hence, the ambitious outside dramatist with visions of the possibilities of the speaking screen must bide his time. He must not be impatient with the caterpillar in his eagerness to secure the butterfly.

Even now, if he is so minded, he may submit a photodrama in full play form; with dialog and business all carefully worked out. No studio would reject it out of hand for that reason alone. If it should prove attractive and happen to

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meet the immediate needs of a company, it would probably be accepted and at a price in excess of what a mere plot sketch would command.

But this would be a remarkably exceptional circumstance. So exceptional, indeed, and so unlikely, that no unestablished writer would be justified in expending on such an effort the time and labour it would involve.

Moreover, it must be constantly borne in mind that intrinsic merit alone is not sufficient to insure success in the marketing of literary wares in Hollywood. Nor must this be wholly attributed to lack of appreciation on the part of cinema editors and producers. Thousands of recognisedly excellent literary productions—novels, stories, dramas—are conscionably and deliberately discarded in the ever eager search for available screen material. Considerations of which the outsider has no adequate conception enter into the selecting of such material, quite aside from any question of its artistic merit.

These considerations involve questions of studio policy, cost of production, timeliness, public taste, screen personalities, censorship, box-office demands, foreign markets, and a score of others of like general character. They far exceed in number and weight any similar business considerations governing the decisions of magazine editors, book publishers or stage producers.

The captious and disgruntled author, with his commendable ideals, needs constantly to be reminded that Hollywood is a commercial institution. It exists and continues to thrive because of its ability to make pictures at a financial profit; and it has learned through experience and a shrewd understanding what type and sort of pictures appeal to the masses. Art,

ideals, culture, education, are but incidental or secondary considerations.

In other words, the author must take Hollywood as he finds it. He cannot expect to hold it to the standards and conventions of other institutions or traditions. He may scorn its methods, its attitude, manners; but such scorn only reacts to his own irritation. It affects Hollywood not in the least.

Whether Hollywood will ever again, following its earlier practice, offer a welcome to the unknown free-lance scenario writer is highly problematical. Writing for the screen, preparing a story for the director and the camera-man, is not only essentially collaborative, but is also of a nature requiring an intimate knowledge of film conditions, an acquaintanceship with the technicalities of picture making, and personal contact with the studios. And the advent of the talkies has accentuated rather than minimised these restrictions.

The author's approach to the screen must continue to be through the published book or story or the produced stage play. And if he thus succeeds in coming within hailing distance, he may be invited to Hollywood. No one can do any direct scenario work away from Hollywood. And once here he may be set the task of lending a hand—but no more than lending a hand—at photodramatising his own work; or “doping out” an original screen play; or sitting in on story conferences with the production boss and his literary carpenters; or supplying the spoken lines for somebody else's inarticulate creation; or he may be asked merely to make himself generally useful around the story department of the shop.

But he must not expect under any circumstances to be given

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a free hand to create from beginning to end a finished scenario complete in all its details. That sort of solo work passed out a decade ago. Strictly speaking, there is to-day no such profession as scenario writing—that is, in the sense that we speak of writing a novel or a play, wherein an author prepares a finished work directly for presentation to the public. Jeanie Macpherson, Cecil de Mille's scenarist, is the only remaining member of the one-time flourishing profession of scenario writing. She alone continues to write directly and completely for the screen, beginning with the originating of the story and following through in every detail to the writing of the final "Fade-out" of the continuity.

Despite the obvious facts to the contrary, we hear it perennially stated that the day of the original screen writer is dawning; that the Shakespeare of the screen is about to make his advent. It sounds learned and prophetic and serves to hearten the trusting outlander. But it is merely one of those handy *clichés* that do service in a pinch for the want of something wiser to say. It has had a special revival since the advent of the talkies, due to the confusion of ideas created by the seeming correspondence between the speaking photoplay and the stage drama.

Time will very clearly demonstrate that such correspondence is only suppositious, or superficial at most. Intrinsically there is no identity or dependency between these two forms of dramatic expression. Their respective media distinctly differentiate them. And this differentiation will grow and become increasingly evident as the talkie develops.

There will never be a Shakespeare of the photodrama, for the simple reason that it is essentially a composite and

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collaborative creation. It must necessarily be so, to meet the inherent complexities of cinema production; and the addition of speech has now added one more complexity and still further removed the possibility of personal unification of creativeness.

It has already called into being another specialist, a further addition to the coterie of minds and specialised talents required in the building of a scenario. Together with the plot originator, the story fabricator, the treatment writer, the title writer, the continuity writer, the gag man, the supervisor of production, the editor, the production manager, the technical director, the art director, the research director, the censorship expert, and the picture director, the dialog writer has now his special part as a contributor to the finished whole.

Only by a thorough realisation of the complete uniqueness of the photodrama can the author view the situation complacently. So long as he persists in appraising the screen by the norms and refinements of the world of letters, just so long will he continue to be disquieted and resentful, and regard Hollywood as hopeless. But once he is properly oriented and becomes conscious of the fact that the cinema is a world apart, he will either leave Hollywood alone or accept the conditions as they necessarily there exist.

If he sells the film rights to his book or his play, he must not expect to see his work translated to the screen in its original version. If he deceives himself with any other expectation it were better for his peace of soul that he refuse to accept the twenty-five thousand dollars and content himself with a snap of his artistic fingers.

Or, if he be lured to Hollywood to write for the screen, let

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him at once abandon all thought of being lionised or accorded the attention and amenities that attach to authorship in the cloistered realm of literature. Hollywood knows nothing about such traditional niceties, and cares less. Its manners and outlook are those of the frontier—practical, utilitarian, democratic, self-assured, aggressive. A writer here is merely “one o’ them writin’ fellers.” He simply has his place in picture-making along with the electrician and the make-up man. If he cannot tolerate this, cannot adapt himself to it, let him take warning in time and remain at home. Hollywood will not miss him.

CLIFFORD HOWARD.

SUR LES ECRANS GENEVOIS

Il n'est peut-être pas inutile, à l'heure où le cinéma sommeille et où le public, lassé, déserte les salles obscures pour retrouver la vie palpable, de faire un petit examen rétrospectif de la saison 1928-1929. L'évènement en fut la projection libre, enfin ! des films russes, saluée par les clameurs apeurées de quelques-uns exploitée aussi, il faut le dire franchement, par le parti socialiste.

Menace pour ceux-ci, stimulation pour ceux-là . . . il ne restait guère de place pour le cinéphile désireux de jouir en

paix des qualités esthétiques des bandes de Pudowkine, Preobrashenskaja ou Ozep. Le public, en général, n'apprécia guère le style impitoyablement cru, le pessimisme, si objectif pourtant, de *La Carte Jaune*, du *Village du Peché*. Il apprécia moins encore la sobriété, la simplicité des faits exposés, des attitudes. La profondeur réelle n'est pas plus son fait que ne l'est l'analyse poussée du caractère humain. Le public, de façon générale, veut de la distraction facile, des spectacles qui ne requièrent qu'une attention minime, des sujets légers comme aussi de légères toilettes. De là la vogue, pourtant atténuée aujourd'hui, des " plats doux " américains.

Il serait injuste pourtant d'englober tous les spectateurs dans cette première catégorie car nombreux sont aussi ceux qui apprécient le film soviétique, non pour son caractère politique, je le répète, mais pour les richesses visuelles qu'il contient. Les paysages, les ciels en particulier, de F. Ozep plongèrent plus d'un spectateur dans un ravissement d'extase. La vérité si intense du jeu des acteurs fut une autre source d'étonnement et de joie, tout comme les parallèles de pensées et d'images chers à Pudowkine. Citons encore, parmi les films russes projetés en séances publiques : *Tempête Sur L'Asie* *Le Feu Sur la Volga* et *Le Cadavre Vivant* . . . et en séances privées : *Dura Lex* et *Potemkin*.

Les Russes abandonnent déjà les motifs propagandistes . . . et c'est un bien car ainsi nous ne serons plus partagés entre deux camps politiques, et l'art cinématographique ne souffrira aucunement d'une orientation nouvelle.

Puisque nous sommes si sévères à l'égard des films américains, n'hésitons pas à blâmer ceux qui, dans la même production, peuvent réaliser de fort belles choses comme *La*

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Toison D'or, La Foule, L'Aurore, Solitude, Une Femme Dans Chaque Port, à côté d'innombrables romans-feuilletons pour concierges. King Vidor et Paul Féjos, auteurs respectifs de *La Foule* et de *Solitude*, ne sont plus autorisé à produire autre chose que des oeuvres fortes, d'inspiration virile. Craignons seulement que les sonorités filmées noient à tout jamais ces premières tentatives honorables des techniciens d'Outre-Atlantique.

De France, nous sont venus *Thérèse Raquin, Jeanne d'Arc, l'Equipage, Le Chapeau de Paille l'Italie*, que nous pouvons classer sans hésitation parmi les meilleurs films de 1928. Qui donc pourrait douter de l'avenir du cinéma français et du talent des *Jeunes* cinéastes qui, à Paris, gagnent à peine leur vie, il est vrai, mais dont la persévérance triomphera finalement de l'indifférence, de la mauvaise volonté même des financiers du film. L'on s'apercevra bien, un jour, Dieu veuille que ce soit le plus tôt possible ; que ces jeunes-la sont les seuls susceptibles d'entretenir la vitalité du cinéma français et de lui permettre de tenir tête aux avalanches de pellicules américaines. Il faut surtout, pour cela, que toute liberté leur soit laissée au studio et pour le choix des scénarios.

L'Allemagne, elle, nous envoie ses spécialités techniques signées presque exclusivement Fritz Lang : *Metropolis, Les Espions*. Si le sens de la mesure n'est pas toujours suffisamment observé, si l'on affectionne trop souvent une certaine obscurité, ce n'est pourtant pas aux dépens de l'effet général des films. Le moins qu'on puisse en dire est qu'ils sont construits solidement, étonnent par leurs proportions massives et ne manquent jamais d'impressionner fortement

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l'imagination des spectateurs. Bien différents de ceux-là sont les films de Pabst, d'origine viennoise il est vrai. *Crise*; *Jeanne Ney* se font valoir par leurs finesses. Le dernier, surtout, est réellement transcendant.

Pu nombre des meilleurs documentaires, citons: *Chang*, qui tint l'affiche assez longtemps et revint sans lasser le public, *Perdus Au Pole*, *Expedition de Sauvetage du Krassine*. Et tout dernièrement, *Berlin*, de W. Ruttmann, qui, dans une modeste salle, doubla le cap de la semaine.

FREDDY CHEVALLEY.

PLASTIC DESIGN

Whatever you may think of Erich Pommer's supervision, (remember he is paid to *make* money, not *lose* it), and Hans Schwartz's powers of intelligent direction; whatever your criticism (it will be personal) of Brigitte Helm, Lederer, and Warwick Ward, you will agree that the architecture of *Nina Petrovna*, better known as *The Wonderful Lie*, is worthy of record. Art-direction such as this does not come your way every day. In those souvenir programmes, almost useless, we remain unacquainted with the designers. Set design, according to Messrs. Gaumont-British, who are the English distributors, and therefore responsible, is of no importance. There was no credit title.

CLOSE UP

But from the knowledge of our memories we supply the names of the pair of designers in German studios who have achieved so much in the past. Of Herren Walter Röhrig and Robert Herlth's early history and apprenticeship I know little, save that Röhrig, together with Herman Warm and Walter Reimann, was an art-director to Robert Wiene on *Caligari*, and that is some time ago.

Of their combined work in *Faust*, Mr. Macpherson, your editor says "... effects of pure Dürer-esque engraving touched up with Breughel ... Dürer was in the interiors ...". He is referring in particular to the camera, but unconsciously, I hazard, to the settings, and the amazing mediaeval and yet modern atmosphere created by them.

In 1925, with *Tartuffe*, their work came to be noticed. Later, here in London, it was discreetly referred to by the critics who matter. For instance, in *The Architectural Review* of January, 1929, we read, "... the simple but baroque setting, the air of elegance, the domestic ornaments, the draperies ...". and it is spoken of with unstinted praise, but the names of their creators are omitted. To those who have shellacked a floor (S.X. board), or erected a handrail (old stock), in England, the tone of this design, (*Tartuffe*), the exquisite beauty of its detail, the moulded plasterwork so typically German, (it is done on the floor and *not* in the plasterer's shop, and therein lies the difference) the carefully wrought ironwork, the properties which harmonise even to the smallest detail, (remember Elmire's ring) these are all something worth while. They are design, knowledge, architecture, tone, modernism, plastic value, and TASTE. Röhrig and Herlth do not imitate the eighteenth century.

CLOSE UP

They look at it from a twentieth century viewpoint. Contrast, for a moment, *Madame Pompadour* and *Tartuffe* and you will realise.

I pass over *Looping the Loop* and come to *Nina Petrovna* and stop. Those travelling shots of Hoffmann, with the camera almost realising Mr. Blakeston's suggestion of human personification, nosing into every corner (pity poor Brigitte) would have nothing but mere technical accomplishment and mechanical dexterity to support them if it were not for the creative minds of Röhrig and Herlth. The layout of the sets, they are not easy to diagnose with a travelling shot and the camera turning on itself, was designed entirely around these moving camera evolutions.

In the fat bulging cornices and rich swelling mouldings, we perceive the work of Röhrig and Herlth. We find it again in the twist of the staircase in Petrovna's house, (how could Schwartz mistake his shooting angles?) the struggling cherubs on the newel post, the curtains festooned over the doorways, the curving astricles of the panels on the door behind the Helm's head (close up), the massive but eminently suitable furniture (plaster) in and about the bedroom and boudoir. Once more in the night-club, or wherever the loose virtue congregated in pre-war Russia, a curving staircase, so apt for Warwick Ward to descend, and a plashing fountain, so near and yet so far from the early Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer period, (forgive me, Mr. Coward.) These, and a lot more are the work of Röhrig and Herlth. I decline to answer if they were responsible for the wicked painted backcloths.

I do not know the workings of Röhrig and Herlth, their

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plans, their elevations, their methods, their carpenters, and their plasterers, but I do know the results and I know that they are good. Confusion may surround the building of their sets, as it does in every studio, but creative designing will come through the mire and triumph. Despite circumstances, Alfred Jünge achieved something at Elstree. Did you ever see his music-room for *Piccadilly*? Go and look again, then.

Röhrig and Herlth are not content with one drawing for a set design. They conceive hundreds, of every little corner, of the action, of the movement, of the lighting; nothing is left out and every detail is considered. What did they think of Elstree? I cannot tell you but they constructed models for Robison's *Informer*. The rest is being done there. But not by them. Good luck to it.

PAUL ROTH.

BITS AND PIECES

The London cine Amateurs are disorganised into bits and pieces. They have half a dozen individual clubs in London alone, and the smallness of their size generates a bunch of problems which retards progress.

In each club there is a mere handful of members of widely different intelligences, and there are not enough of them to

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fall naturally into units who would produce films suitable to their own stage of advancement. The one or two most energetic people who *do* get going, seem to be overcome with delight at being at the helm of the ship, and hatch ambitious five reel stories which, normally would require only a few players, but actually have to accommodate the remaining members of the club, who would otherwise be at a loose end for 'something to do'. Such a state of affairs unbalances the most cool headed story, and the resulting scenario progresses like a car on five wheels.

The small club has small finances. Film negative is scarce, with the result that a film normally occupying five reels has to be squeezed into two reels of animate tableaux. The nett result is a waste of time.

I have noticed a fine photographer in club A, a good director in club B, and a tip-top scenario writer in club C. We might see results if they would only get together, but, usually, they have not even met each other. As it is, the poor photographer has to do almost everything, including some of the acting. The unfortunate director was also at his wits' end last time I saw him. It is too bad to have to direct a scene fraught with Freudian complexes, while bullying a consumptive arc into an occasional splutter!

It is true that improvement would follow more efficient organisation within even the smallest clubs, but, if such organisation should exist, how far would it be useful to so small a unit. Much of the energy of the organisers, which might have beneficial effects on a wide circle of people, would be frittered away upon a small community.

Amalgamation will solve many problems of the amateur.

CLOSE UP

The many members of one London club would naturally shake down into stratas. The handful of adventurous leaders would each become a sign post to which would be attracted members at their own stage of progress. The resulting team competition spirit would introduce one of the strongest urges towards progress.

In two clubs I know of, the beginners often feel unhappy. They find everything in the hands of one or two noisy people, and are frightened away, because they do not find enough folks like themselves to generate the team spirit.

But a National Convention of amateurs is planned to take place in the late autumn in London. I hear that the response to the idea is very encouraging indeed. This is great news. All praise be to Mr. T. J. Wilson, secretary of the Amateur Cinematographers Association, who is taking a leading part in organising the Convention. It is going to be a big job fitting the bits and pieces together, and it seems that many would-be useful pieces will stay apart for some while yet.

Really constructive competitions are being arranged, and it is hoped to lay the foundations of a central organisation, including a library (films and books), studio, club rooms, etc.

Now we are getting a chance to move. Will it be taken?

ORLTON WEST.

COMMENT AND REVIEW

FILMS IN HISTORY.—No. 3.

"La Petite Marchande d'Alumettes."

Directed by : Jean Renoir.

Settings by : Eric Aes.

Mme. Rosemonde Gérard and M. Maurice Rostand took the matter to the High Courts. They told the Bench that Jean Tedesco, in producing *La Petite Marchande d'Alumettes*, had infringed the copyright of a play they had written. M. Tedesco said, that possibly M. Renoir had been influenced, but by Andersen rather than Rostand. In catty manner (his film has been held up a whole year on account of legal proceedings) he further opined that Rostand had found some of his ideas at the same source.

The picture is quite a charming fairy tale.

Catherine Hessling fails to sell a match, she dare not go home. She shelters behind a loose plank resting against a house. After shots of the tumble-down shack, which does duty for her home—the chimney pot draped in mid-air—we feel that she has not done so badly for herself. In the elfin

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tradition of Catherine Hessling she peeps out from behind the plank, half an eye and a pouting mouth.

She walks along in bedroom slippers, she tucks her arms under her arm-pits.

The handsome hero nearly buys a match-box and the Hessling's Hesslingisms. Rich friends drag him into a tea-shop. Frost on the glass rubbed off and the Hessling sees a lap-dog being fed on expensive cake.

She has a dream in the snow. She splits up, divides into two, dances with herself in the avant-garde manner; dances into the land of toys.

The camera is kept very low on the ground and speckled tops spin in the foreground. Catherine rolls away a coloured ball, rockets Jack from his box, makes the wooden soldiers believe that they have been engaged for the *Chauve-Souris*, sets the dancers dancing and the prince courting, hangs stars and moon in cardboard heaven.

It is dangerous to play with toys; they disappoint or break. Jack has a row with the prince. Ears of the woolly dog fall down. The fairy tale, as it takes us behind the scenes, gives inside dope on why the sturdy dolly falls to pieces in nurse's gentle hand. The callous child does not realize that dolly may be committing suicide on account of unrequited love. So it is dangerous to play with toys; it gives life to them and life means. For a moment we thought that we were writing the titles for the film!

Catherine shatters her toyland. Line of nine-pin soldiers fall down. The prince is chased by Jack-in-the-box. Across the clouds, reeling and spinning, the prince falls to land. A rose tree covers the grave of Catherine.

CLOSE UP

To make the event of greater historical importance René Clair might have joined in; his *Voyage Imaginaire* has analogies. Clair introduces satire. Characters from a provincial bank let loose in an enchanted palace, crawling on ceilings. Balloons straining upwards, truly dreamlike. But Clair has got no shots of the Hessling lighting matches to warm herself in the snow; symbol of her personality which flashes up to warm what exhibitors call our "heart."

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

(Mr. Stuart Davis has booked this film for the Avenue Pavilion. *Ed.*)

FILMS IN HISTORY.—No. 4.

L'Homme Du Large.

Directed by : Marcel L'Herbier.

Made : 1920 in June and July.

For once I would change it to *History of Films*. *Le Torrent*, *El Dorado*, *Don Juan* and *Faust*; the early L'Herbier films did make a difference! *L'Homme Du Large* was one of the best.

The white streets and hats call for a frame; old Dutch masters. There is no overflowing of the picture, no running beyond the edges of the screen and mingling of character and drama with the spectator.

Walking through a classical picture gallery one is struck

CLOSE UP

by the way in which so many artists see everything dead-on. Instead of using angles, L'Herbier experimented with fancy iris effects to break away.

The vow of the man who will have nothing to do with the world is the vow of the man who belongs to the sea. He educates his child himself, but the boy is recreant. Stealing money from the saintly sister, dancing while the orchestra plays funeral music for his mother, he behaves none too well; and his father, to show his disgust, finally half strangles him and turns him adrift in an open boat.

There is much that strikes home in the shots of the cockle-shell boat, rustling out into shavings of a metal sea.

Jacques Catelain is said to have given his best performance in this picture: it is arresting.

The story is told pleasantly in successive tableaux. *L'Argent* probably cost twelve times as much and is more than twelve times worse. Even from a box-office angle it fails. A dramatic point of the story shows an aviator starting on a long-distance flight. The man in the street—the man in the street in the cinema—is expected to become excited about the results of the expedition. Will he get there? Will he crash? A shot of an aeroplane travelling in the clouds. He is there! Now is that value at the box-office? The audience knows that he has not made the flight. If the aeroplane had crashed, in “firework manner,” it would have been box-officely cinematic but the other is simply the bunk.

It would be an excellent thing if some directors went to see their contributions to film history, and they might find some entertainment after the carking hours of rushes.

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

A FILM THAT SHOULD BE MADE FROM A
BOOK.

Mr. A. Zwemmer of Charing Cross Road has just issued an English edition of a sensational book dealing with Art forms in Nature.

The book contains a series of photographs by Professor Karl Blossfeld with an introduction by Karl Nierendorf. The photographs consist of greatly magnified reproductions from plant life and were expressly taken to show the amazing relationship which exists between all art forms and natural phenomena.

Renger-Patzsch stressed the aesthetic pleasure to be derived from symmetrically grouped petals and leaves, and Professor Blossfeld has caught with his camera wonderful white mists spaced out with star-shaped foliage, thistles which might have been transferred to the paper from the silk of a flag so balanced are they in detail, and primly bunched rosettes from the Art and Craft shops.

But with unparalleled care and patience the professor goes further. He shows that "In the blade of grass, in the tree-trunk, in the flower, lives and works the same structural urge as in the brain, the nerves and the hands of mankind."

Prototypes of every style of historic ornament can easily be recognized. A fern, before it is fully unfurled, suggests a bishop's crosier; pods on a long stem have the rhythmic quality of a classical dance-group; a segment of a stalk, drained of its sap, might be the crown of a king; a close up of a branch reveals characteristics of a totem pole, two

CLOSE UP

strangely comic faces adorned by bulbous noses and fantastic head-dresses; fluted growths might be Chinese pagodas or sugar cakes, others have a more monumental quality; there are leaves as formally designed as any church window.

Modern art is represented by a mandrake which recalls the gestures of a dancer, by poppy heads like futurist lampshades, and by a cork-screwing vine tendril which is related to the wire sculpture of Alexandra Calder.

British Instructional Films, who have given us so many magnificent documents of plant life, ought to feel inspired by such a book to attempt the decorative side of Nature, only such a film must have the motivation which holds together Professor Blossfeld's lovely collection of stills.

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

DIE WELT IST SCHON.

Albert Renger-Patzsch exhibited at Stuttgart. A book of his has been published under the title, *Die Welt Ist Schön*.

In an introduction we are told that Renger-Patzsch is not a portrait photographer. "But," the writer asks ingenuously, "are not animals and flowers more interesting than men?" The same writer picks out for special praise a picture of steps, which might suggest sea waves, leading to a suspension-bridge at Dresden; and a magnification of the heart of a plant which is strangely architectural.

CLOSE UP

We should have chosen the tiny, snow-laden branches of pine trees, the Chinese-puzzle snake, the three sick apes, some of his groups of frying pans and tiles, or the hands clasped in prayer.

We may be misled by the selection in the book, but we should say that the two things which mark out the work of Renger-Patzsch are: a hatred of stunts and double exposure, and a peculiar trick of weaving his background into his foreground. Apart from some trees, stereoscopically grouped, his landscapes deliberately pattern on to one surface.

Most of the things which Renger-Patzsch makes us examine we know already to be beautiful (fox-gloves, tigers, negro children), but after inspecting a hundred photographs under one cover we felt cheered and grateful.

O.B.

SECOND THOUGHTS ON PUDOVKIN AS ACTOR.

Publicity departments do not trouble much about highly charged word mechanisms. *The Living Corpse* was produced by the GREAT Ozep and featured the WONDERFUL Pudovkin (*vide* synopsis). The information was also thrown in that Mr. Pudovkin had directed many Russian pictures including *Potemkin*!

On the whole we did not feel inspired to rush into print, the picture did not come to us as a thyndwrckxpz (thank you Mr. Joyce) on the other hand we want to give every encouragement to Pro Patria who are presenting this film as the first of a series of Russian subjects.

CLOSE UP

Rumours had reached *Close Up* many months ago that the morality of this picture was a little dated, so let us be content with a hint that Ozep is not quite so great in this one, or Pudovkin so wonderful.

O.B.

ON LOOKING AT BRIGITTE HELM.

One can go to see the pictures or one can go to see Brigitte Helm. This is forced on one because of the pictures in which the Helm now appears.

The *Society Scandal* would not have made critics leave home had the Helm been saved from one of those film star dances which set a whole audience clapping, although they make the real audience motherly or mad, and given a part worthy of her beauty.

We cannot believe that the Helm could starve, could be a victim of all these male villains. It is so obvious that the girl could make herself economically independent by going on the pictures.

There was the old father in the Banky's talkie who wailed because he had no money to give his daughter, and all the time we wanted to say to him, "You silly fool you could make a fortune doing that on the pictures." But it is terrible that these short-sighted supervisors should be treating the Helm like this.

O.B.

THE EPSTEIN BOOM.

The cinéastes have been twittering about *Finis Terrae*, *The Fall of the House of Usher* and the great Mr. E. who made them both.

Without any notice an Epstein was shown in the heart of London at a little cinema. It was called *The Lion of Mongolia*.

A prologue introduced the East which makes us at once think of the West. It became visible when the hero prince was pursued by pursuers through a forest (not far from Paris) decorated with rosettes pinned to homely oaks and spruce firs. Some of the dresses, however, were fanciful but spoilt by photography as hard as it could be without cutting the screen.

The story concerned a film company. They used a Pathé. The villain ran the show and said. "I'll get him, damn his soul, I'll get him." At least his expression was equal to it. Ivan Mosjoukine and the Lissenko looked older than one could have imagined they will look in ten years time.

Now if it had been, that which we are always urging a film should be, something from life, it might have technically dated but it would have kept a value as history of fashion, thought, custom: but it is a feuilleton, it not only dates it bores.

OSWELL BLAKESTON.

CLOSE UP

"METROPOLIS" IN WOOLLIES.

Life in 1940.

If only they had paid more attention to sound recording in 1940 we might have been spared the effects of actors in need of throat pastilles.

We could go through this picture giving a documentation of the absurdities and failures in imagination of the art department and production staff, but we do not think *High Treason* is worth the space.

There is one attempt to show that *Potemkin* has been heard of: the sequence of CLOSE UPS after the bombs have been let loose on the head-quarters of the Peace Mission. Blood streaming from the mouths, and all the rest, but the same old extras instead of Mr. Eisenstein's types.

O. B.

A THOUGHT ON THE "MYSTIC MIRROR" AND BIG SCREENS.

"With Magnafilm the director will be able to complete his action without breaks, which will be especially valuable in musical pictures where the additional screen area will also be a tremendous asset in picturing ensemble numbers."

Could you imagine quick cuts on an enlarged screen?

We thought just how much Magnafilm will change the art of the director when we were watching Carl Hoffman's *Mystic Mirror* at the Avenue Pavilion . . . The great names

CLOSE UP

in the cameraworld, Freund, Wagner, Hoffman, they understand how to make use of the limitations of the silver sheet. Look at the groups of heads, the trees, and the lonely rushes in the *Mystic Mirror*. To amplify one example there is a shot of the servant girl pushed into a room where the master of the castle is conducting an orgy. Fritz Rasp has not seen the girl before, he bends right forward and up (we know that it is to keep him in the picture with the girl at the door), and he looks like some gargoyle springing from the wall, which is in this case, the edge of the screen. The whole composition would be too bloated on a big surface, so would most of the angles that are arresting.

We welcome the new but we point out there will be a change. Sweeps of staircase and tiny figures might be most effective on the new canvas.

O. B.

ONE SWALLOW.

We have at last turned out a picture that can be looked at and listened to without wondering why we paid money to come in to see the damned thing. And the British cinema world will not let us forget it. Each time they are boiled by the Press for some fresh indiscretion they will say in a pained way: "But how can you have forgotten that *Blackmail* was a British film?"

There are nice things in *Blackmail* and not all of them are in sound, or in the gossip of the lady who keeps on saying

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KNIFE. For example the heroine is stealing from the house where she has stabbed her would-be seducer the camera mixes from the interior to the exterior in such a way that she is facing herself, opening the door on herself. The suspense of the scene is *can she get out without being seen?* When the door opened and the girl, in a slow mix, peered at herself, at least one old dame near us cried UUUUH!

If only we could all go ahead and forget that we had made one fair film. Perhaps it would be a good thing if a general reference were made to the British stills in July's *Close Up*.

O. B.

BOOK REVIEW.

A BLUE BOOK OF NON-THEATRICAL FILMS.

The publishers of *Educational Screen* have sent us a little book cataloguing, with a certain amount of selection, films which can be hired in America by owners of private projectors.

Both films of 35 and 16 millimetre are included.

Some of the descriptions, which are printed after each title, have a humour of an unintentional kind.

For example:—

"*Working for Dear Life*. Compares necessity for giving automobile regular overhauling to man's need for periodic health examination.

"*Sniffle Snuffles*. Simple facts about the common cold: told with living silhouettes and cartoon animation.

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"*The Last Rose of Summer*. Tom Moore's immortal masterpiece pictorized."

Still it is in every way an admirable effort and it should be paralleled in England. There is far too much uncertainty in Wardour Street about which pictures belong to which firms. We know of one vault stacked with possible finds, and the owners cannot tell you what films they own, or what films they are supposed to own, or even definitely say whether they have a smuggled copy of *Potemkin* amongst the debris! ("Well, old man, you know we might. Can't say for sure. Difficult to keep track of stuff, old man.")

One Thousand and One Films is sold for 75 cents a copy and can be obtained from 5, South Wabash Avenue. Chicago.

O. B.

NO INDULGENCES.

The cinema world had the nearest approach to a pretty scene that has occurred in London since the showing of the *Pudovkin* films, when it was announced a few minutes before the actual time of screening that *Martin Luther* could not be trade-shown. A number of clergymen had gathered, plus wives, plus families and surrounded the excellent and elegant commissionaire who, in mufti, they mistook for the manager. Outside, a film-camera turned. A lady with a red "Workers of the World Unite" peace-badge became

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eloquent on the subject of censorship millstones in connection with drowning, and various hissing complaints rose from black-coated gentlemen about "The Italian Mission", "Cardinal Bourne" and "utter want of freedom". "They don't want the truth shown" said someone with the air of discovering something. "They" may be anyone, but the rather antique variety of the pronoun represented by the censorship certainly don't, even whatever is in *M. Luther*: it is pleasant to think that one section at least of the, or a, Church have come to blows with the censor. Many films are cut or forbidden for being irreligious: of the reverse, we have had *Joan*, for one thing, not shown, and we now have *Luther* banned on other grounds. The Taj Mahal film is supposed to have caused offence in India; it may have been banned there. It hasn't been here, I don't know if it has been booked. It is a British film.

Now *Luther* isn't a great film, but it has received, as bad books do on being suppressed, a great deal of publicity. So has the Avenue, which is embarking on a season of French works, with the films of the two serious Frenchmen, Epstein and Clair: Germaine Dulac's picture of the shell and the clergyman will probably also be seen by hundreds of clerical visitors who were made acquainted with their existence by this morning's wait in the foyer. So, "everything turns out for the best—or nearly everything." As *Luther* was not passed in time. *The Living Corpse* was put on, but that has no connection with the previous sentence.

R. H.

PHOTO-GENESIS.

A collection tracing all man's efforts to depict movement is for sale in London. It is that famous collection formed during the last thirty years by Will Day, who by dint of having scouts active for him almost everywhere has succeeded in running to earth many pieces of early apparatus that would otherwise have jerked into rust on junk-heaps. The famous animal on a cave wall in Spain (isn't it?) with many legs given it by an artist trying to show it running . . . a Chinese shadowgraph of the year 200 . . . a Thaumotrope . . . pictures taken by row of cameras with threaded shutters . . . many Friese Greene relics . . . and one of those many pieces of the First Film (how long it must have been). Films occur too, but are not an important part of the collection, which deals with the means by which the illusion of movement is given, and so concentrates on apparatus.

It is an exciting thing that Mr. Day has done, and it was even more exciting if you think what the cinema was then, when he began it. Most of us weren't conscious and a disgusting number of those who were weren't movie-conscious. Quite a lot of us mightn't have been, either. Consider the reception given to the invention of talkies—the invention, not the almost always abominable product.

The collection is to be sold in one lot by Messrs Harris and Gillow, who estimate it at a quarter of a million pounds. But though it would have this value to film-students, it can hardly be expected to have it for the kind of person who buys firsts of *Alice in Wonderland* and will probably go for several less thousands, which alters our opinion of Mr. Day's

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interesting foresight and gallant collection not one whit. It doesn't seem a bad chance for the British Empire Film Institute to distinguish itself; that body must do something to restore its dignity after collecting *Sorrell and Son* on account of its beautiful English scenery and what else?

R. H.

HOLLYWOOD NOTES.

Universal Company have acquired the film rights to *All Quiet on the Western Front*. Five or six other Hollywood companies submitted bids for the book, which has created as great a stir in America as it has in Europe. Preparations for its filming are already well under way, with a view to completing the picture before the end of the year.

* * *

George Arliss has completed his vitaphone production of *The Green Goddess* for Warner Brothers and is now in the midst of the filming of his most celebrated stage play, *Disraeli*. Mrs. Arliss, as she did on the stage, plays the rôle of Disraeli's wife. The cast includes also two other British players—David Torrence (in the character of the manager of the Bank of England) and Anthony Bushnell, a recent acquisition to Hollywood's foreign colony.

* * *

The Thirteenth Chair, directed by Tod Browning, is a forthcoming M-G-M mystery play. Its locale is Calcutta,

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and an added touch of realism is given to the picture by the inclusion in its cast of Lal Chand Mehra, a nephew of Swami Pranavenanda, and a member of the family of Prince Raj Kumur, of Sahaspri. In addition to taking part in the picture he is acting as technical adviser in its production.

* * *

Experience has shown that phonofilm comedies require careful timing to allow for the laughs of the audience. This is by no means an easy task, as reactions vary in different audiences. A joke that may produce prolonged laughter and applause in Boston or New York may evoke only a titter in Los Angeles or Chicago. The best that can be done in anticipation of such variations is to strike an approximate medium of time lapse in the dialog. To this end Paramount-Lasky, in their *Two Black Crows* comedy film, try out each play in rehearsal performance before the picture is shot, with two different sets of auditors, each made up of several hundred movie extras. The effect of each joke or gag is carefully noted as to time, and this is used as a guide in the filming.

* * *

Warner Brothers are planning to add to the long list of revues already filmed. This is *The Show of Shows*, and as its title indicates is intended to be the *crème de la crème* of this type of picture. One of its striking features will be the appearance in it of all of the company's leading actors. These will include John Barrymore, George Arliss, Al Jolson, Irene Bordini and others of equal stellar magnitude.

* * *

The "camera cloak" is replacing the sound-proof booths for shielding the noise of camera cranking. This consists of

CLOSE UP

a heavy felt covering and offers the advantage of permitting the camera-man to be in closer touch with the scenes he is shooting than has heretofore been possible with the unwieldy booth.

* * *

Paramount Lasky are filming the operetta, *The Vagabond King*. Ludwig Berger is directing it. The leading rôles are played by Jeanette MacDonald and Dennis King, both recruited from the musical stage.

* * *

The rights to *La Bataille de Dames* have been purchased by M-G-M, and this celebrated European play will shortly go into film production.

* * *

Lionel Barrymore is directing John Gilbert in his forthcoming M-G-M picture, *Olympia*, adapted from Ferenc Molnar's play of the same title.

* * *

Hollywood has discovered through a recent careful analysis of public taste, that there are five major themes of popular interest in pictures. These, ranked according to their degree of popularity, are Love, Mystery, Music, Disaster, Adventure. The advent of the talkies has brought the mystery photodrama well up to the front, and there is not one of the large studios that is not turning out thrillers, to the enjoyment of the crowd and the financial profit of the producers.

* * *

Lon Chaney, who, with Charlie Chaplin, has signed a pledge never to do a talkie, will next be seen, but not heard in a picturization of Major Zinov Peckhoff's *The Bugle*

CLOSE UP

Sounds. It is a story dealing with the Foreign Legion, in North Africa. George Hill, the director, sometime ago made a special trip to the actual scenes of the book and secured many thousands of feet of atmospheric shots. The actual picture, however, is being made at the M-G-M studios and on location in Arizona.

* * *

The "symphonies under the stars" in the Hollywood Bowl have become one of the established institutions of Hollywood. Largely financed and patronized by the film colony, these out-of-door symphony concerts given during the summer weeks are nightly attended by large crowds, ranging in numbers from fifteen to twenty thousand for each concert. The Bowl is an enormous natural amphitheatre in the hills immediately back of Hollywood. The conductors during the present season have been Bernardino Molinari, of Rome, Eugene Goossens, of London, and Bruno Walter, of Berlin.

C.H.

NEW EDUCATIONAL FILMS FROM UFA.

SECRETS OF THE EGG-SHELL ON HELIGOLAND.

Dr. Ulrich K. T. Schulz, photographer P. Krien and Miss Hertha Jülich, the microscope expert of the Ufa Kultur Dept., are staying on the island of Heligoland to take a number of interesting pictures of biological processes at the

CLOSE UP

State Biological Institute. First of all a number of important nautic-biological pictures will be taken for the new Ufa educational-super *Secrets of the Egg-Shell*, showing the development of various North Sea fish beginning with the egg. Pictures will also be taken for another educational, entitled *Development in a Round About Way*, showing the various phases of development of the sea-urchin, the crawfish, the lobster and other sea-creatures.

* * * "BOBBY" ON THE SCREEN.

"Bobby," the only orang-utan baby living in Europe, plays the leading part in a new Ufa-educational *What Animals Can be Taught*, which has been produced by Dr. Ulrich Schulz at the Zoological Garden of Nuremberg. "Bobby" is the only orang-utan baby which has been successfully raised in Europe, every other effort having so far failed in the European climate. Although "Bobby's" mother died soon after he was born, "Bobby," lived on to become a great screen star.

Some very interesting pictures were also taken at the Nuremberg Zoo showing the life and activities of sea-lions with a slow-motion lens. The opportunities were unusual as Nuremberg has the largest collection of sea-lions in Europe.

* * * DR. ULRICH K. T. SCHULZ FINISHED HIS 100TH EDUCATIONAL.

The Ufa Kultur Dept. has completed another educational entitled *City-Animals*. This picture portrays the interesting

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life and behaviour of many semi-wild animals still living amidst highest civilization in the world's largest cities. Squirrels, wild-ducks, sea-gulls, singing-birds, swallows and many others, all dwellers in the German capital, are not generally observed in the turmoil of metropolitan traffic life, yet they are there and may be seen in this highly interesting and fascinating film. Dr. Ulrich K. T. Schulz and Wolfram Junghans directed this picture, which is the hundredth educational production completed by Dr. Schulz during his long experience as an Ufa-educational expert.

* * *

GAMES AND DANCES IN THE ANIMAL LIFE.

Wolfram Junghans is taking a number of interesting shots for the new Ufa-educational *Games and Dances in the Animal Life*, at the Ufa-Kultur-Studio at Neubabelsberg, where Siamese fighting fish are brought before the camera during their fighting and mating season.

* * *

FIRST UFATONE-EDUCATIONAL.

The first UFATONE-Educational *Transparent Creatures* has just been completed at Neubabelsberg. *Transparent Creatures* will be first picture of the Ufa-Kultur-Department to reproduce real sound-film recording. The picture shows a series of especially rare species of deep sea animals and their living conditions. Most of the material was obtained by the Ufa-Messina-Expedition. Simultaneously with the screening of the picture, Prof. Dr. Berndt of Berlin University, a noted zoologist, delivers a lecture explaining in detail all the minute activities of these mysterious creatures on the screen.

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DEATH OF THE ARTIST V. P. VOGEL.

Vladimir Vogel died on the 8th of June. Vogel was a very brilliant cinema actor.

The beginning of his work dates from the first years of the development of the Soviet cinema industry. He had not been a professional actor. In the year 1921 he entered the State School of Cinematography, and then, with a number of companions formed a separate group which joined the Kuleshof company.

By his persistent educational, experimental and methodological labours, under the guidance of Lev Kuleshof, Vogel, who was a trained sportsman, soon began to take a prominent position, and in a number of studies proved his serious significance as an actor. During the period of existence of the company and the school, Vogel worked both as an instructor and as an actor.

Together with the company he embarked on productive work (in GOSKINO and then in MESCHRABPOM-FILM, where he worked until the end of his life). Here he found abundant opportunity for experimenting and for reinforcing his skill. He gave great attention to the working out of methods. He did not confine himself to acting, but, taking advantage of specific cinematographic methods, attained an extraordinary variety and depth of experience. This variety is not a casual characteristic; in the course of his life Vogel consciously traversed definite stages.

From *Mr. West* and *The Death Ray*—(a seasonable tribute to Americanism, where he tried to depict the malefactor) to *Miss Mend*—the beginning of the comedian

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tendency, which was subsequently developed almost to a living buffoonery on the pictures, *The Girl with the Box**, and *The House on Trubnaya*, and in the direction of satire in the picture, *The Doll with the Millions*. In sharp contrast with these and completely individual was his part in the film, *According to the Law*†, which is powerfully dramatic. In addition to these pictures, Vogel played a responsible part in a number of productive labours, inventing a special form for each one. He was photographed in the films: *Z-ya Citizen*, *The Land in Bondage*, *What sort of a man are you?* *Chess Fever*, *The Apple*, and finally, in *Salamander*, containing the memorable portrayal of the Fascist forger.

From the moment of his engaging in productive activity, Vogel worked without interruption on picture after picture for 7 years, being concerned often in several films simultaneously. The excessive strain affected his health. In the year 1928 he began to suffer from nervous disorders.

He was on the road to a complete recovery when, in a fit of nervous depression, he committed suicide.

By the death of Vogel, Soviet cinematography has lost an exceptionally talented worker. His importance as an actor was appreciated not only in Russia, but also throughout the world.

* Known also as *Moscow that Laughs and Weeps*.

† Known also as *Expiation*, *Sühne*, and *Dura Lex*.

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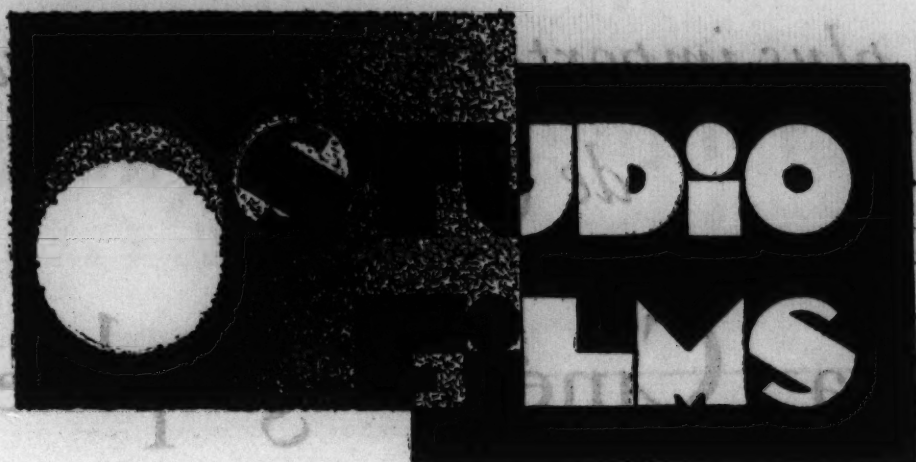
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